

Inspection report for Mottingham Children and Family Centre

Local authority	Bromley
Inspection number	365817
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Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Mick Pittaway
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Mottingham Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Bromley Mytime at Mottingham Village Nurseries Ltd

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and an Early Years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with local authority officers, health professionals, centre staff and parents and carers who use the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The Mottingham Children and Family Centre is a phase 2 centre, designated in 2008 and opened in 2009. It is based in purpose-built accommodation on the two sites at Mottingham and Castlecombe Primary Schools, approximately half a mile apart in the north of the borough of Bromley. The centre does not provide integrated childcare as part of its offer. Childcare facilities are provided in a maintained nursery in Castlecombe Primary School and a privately run nursery in Mottingham Primary School. The nursery provision was not inspected as part of this visit and is inspected separately. The centre's main focus is on supporting families within the reach area, and provides crèche facilities for parents and carers attending courses or consultations at the centre. The area served by the centre is one of the 30% most disadvantaged in the country. Unemployment within the area is high and an above average proportion of households are in receipt of benefits. The reach area consists mainly of social and privately rented housing with the proportion of private ownership below that found nationally. The proportion of teenage mothers is above average. The majority of families in the area are from White British backgrounds with an increasing minority of new families from Eastern Europe. Children's levels on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage are generally below those expected for their age. The area has a history of low academic achievement for White British boys.

The centre is governed by the local authority, with day-to-day management of the Mottingham site overseen by the headteacher of Mottingham Primary School. The leadership of children centres within Bromley and the Bromley Children Project has

been merged to become fully effective from 1 April 2011, and managers have been working towards this structure since November 2010. The centre is open on weekdays from 7.45am to 6.00pm on the Mottingham site, including provision for breakfast and after-school clubs, and from 9.00am to 5.00pm on the Castlecombe site for 48 weeks a year. There is occasional weekend use.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

2

Main findings

The Mottingham Children and Family Centre has a positive impact on the lives of parents, children and other family members within the reach area. Each of the sites is seen as central to their immediate community. Many parents and carers are new to the area, including those from Eastern Europe, and centre activities help them to feel less isolated by meeting others and developing friendships. Parents and carers spoken with during the inspection were wholly positive about the benefits that the centre has brought to their own lives and that of their families, with comments such as: ‘The centre has given me the confidence to leave my children with others, and remember that I can do more’ and ‘Now I will go back to work’. Good publicity about events, for example through the notice board at all local schools, means that there is an ever growing number using the facilities and accessing courses and activities which improve adult skills. There is a strong sense of enjoyment within the centre. Parents and carers indicate that their involvement in courses is appreciated by their children and is having a positive impact on children’s enjoyment of school because parents and carers feel more confident to share in their children’s learning.

The centre coordinators use their in-depth knowledge of the locality effectively and work relentlessly to reach new families and welcome all to the centre. Users say that staff listen to them and respond well to their concerns, pointing them in the direction of other support when this is beyond the scope of the resources of the centre. Good partnerships with a wide range of professionals, particularly health clinics, mean that services within the area are cohesive and coherent for users, with the centre providing good access to a ‘one-stop shop’.

The range of programmes set up within the centre since it opened is well regarded

by users and seen to be significantly improved over those previously in place. However, there are still gaps in provision which centre managers are trying to find ways to address. For example, although there are occasional events in the evening or at weekends, the centre's opening hours limit the range of activities provided for fathers and working parents and carers. Because health services are sited at the Castlecombe site, this centre is working to greater capacity than the Mottingham facility. There is potential to hold more events at the Mottingham site. Safeguarding arrangements are given a high priority and meet statutory requirements. The uptake of programmes, such as first-aid training leading to a qualification, is having a positive impact on the health and safety of children and their families, especially the most vulnerable. The centre is inclusive in its approach, giving attention to the needs of minority groups, such as the 'Parents are Special Too' group for children with disabilities and their parents and carers. One parent attending an activity for children summarised the centre's impact on the lives of parents, carers and children as, 'She's learned to share, do role play, and is getting more confident. I've learned a lot and so has she.'

Parents and carers feel able to share their ideas about which activities they find useful through a thorough evaluation of each programme. A few take this a step further by their membership of the Parent Forum, a local consultative group. Parents and carers feel that their views are listened to and acted upon by centre staff. However, there is no direct involvement of users through formal representation on strategic local authority groups or the Area Steering Group, the decision-making group most closely linked to centre staff.

The centre has achieved considerable success since it opened in 2009, particularly in the quality of partnership work to set up services and activities which are valued by families within the reach area. Since opening, the centre has steadily increased the numbers of families using the range of services provided locally, and new registrations take place almost daily. The centre's accurate self-evaluation and the success of achievements to date are evidence of the centre's good capacity for ongoing improvement. A wealth of evaluation data is being generated and staff have begun to analyse this well to inform development. However, there is potential to use this to greater effect, for example to analyse trends of impact over time against intended outcomes and targets.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the input of parents and carers in decision making through formal representation on strategic groups such as the Area Steering Group.
- Develop the use of evaluation data, particularly in analysing the impact of centre programmes on the outcomes for users over time.
- Widen provision to more closely meet the needs of fathers and working parents and carers and to ensure that the facilities on the Mottingham site are used to greater capacity.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The Mottingham Children and Family Centre engages an increasing number of families in a range of services which help them to learn to keep themselves and their children healthy. Midwife and health visitor services, together with centre-provided activities such as 'Get Healthy with Henry' and 'Early Years Physical Play', support the building of healthy habits for adults and children. However, centrally commissioned smoking cessation programmes have not proved successful with centre users and staff are reviewing and investigating different programmes to engage a wider group of users requiring support to stop smoking.

Children and adults are safe and secure in the centre. Parents and carers gain better understanding of how to keep themselves and children safe through their participation in the services available. For example, the 'Messy Play' session has clear information about ingredients used in the session and emphasises parents' and carers' responsibility to speak to staff about known allergies and to take appropriate measures to ensure the safety of other children. The centre's sensitive and effective involvement with families whose circumstances make them vulnerable, including children who have a child protection plan or those who are looked after, contributes well to children's safety and their emotional well-being. At times of crisis, parents and carers respond well to staff's firm but non-judgemental approach and the positive links with family support workers. The use of the Common Assessment Framework results in effective targeting of resources and links with other agencies to provide coherent support for children and families. Parents and carers feel secure enough to raise issues themselves, and are referred to counselling or outreach support if needed.

The range of parenting programmes as well as regular centre activities such as 'Messy Play' and 'Parents Are Special Too' enable parents and carers to gain new strategies to manage behaviour. All activities for children are based firmly on Early Years Foundation Stage principles, enabling children to learn to make choices and decisions. They successfully learn to share and take turns in the varied and stimulating range of activities provided for each session. Parents, carers and children play and have fun together as they learn new skills and gain fresh knowledge. For example, children's learning and development show good progress in 'Together We Play' as they develop well as active and inquisitive learners. Parents and carers see such sessions as 'great to let children run and move about'. In doing so, children develop well as they learn to respond to the expectations and boundaries set by others and their behaviour is good. An emphasis on parent and carer play with individual children is effectively promoting children's speech and language skills because of the good modelling by activity leaders.

Through their involvement in centre and partner agency services, parents and carers develop their confidence to access further training. This effectively promotes their economic stability and independence, seen for example in the growing number of qualified crèche workers trained by the centre who are now employed to run sessions. Parents and carers value these opportunities. They have been useful in

adding skills to their curriculum vitae (CV) and have led to employment opportunities. The sessions observed during the visit were effectively promoting children’s development, and there are signs that this is beginning to have an impact on children’s overall achievements on entry to school, although the profile remains below average. Parents and carers are beginning to develop ownership of the services provided in the centre through their contribution to the Parent Forum, and are keen to contribute further by joining the Area Steering Group.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

2

Relationships with centre staff are positive and users respond well to the centre’s warm and welcoming environment, enabling users to share their ideas about how provision could be improved further. The centre promotes a good range of activities, and partners such as the Girls’ Friendly Society, Bromley Children and Family Project workers and teenage pregnancy coordinators work well together to support cohesive services through clear referral routes. User evaluations indicate that provision and support are aligned well to users’ needs. Case studies show the positive impact of partnership working to improve all outcomes for users. These include referrals to social care, domestic violence, health professionals, parenting classes, and adult and child centre activities, and the number of users joining additional programmes shows how their needs are being met successfully.

The success of the centre’s provision is seen in increasing attendance levels at services such as health visitor drop-in sessions and children’s play and learning sessions, with many users returning regularly. As one parent said, ‘I come three times a week. It’s brilliant, we get to try new things, meet loads of new people.’ They particularly value the integration of health services, involving midwives and health visitors, with centre activities promoting other aspects of children’s development, so that support is seamless. The centre assesses families’ needs sensitively on registration and staff continue to monitor the impact of the support arrangements

agreed with them. The breakfast club is well attended, providing children and their parents and carers with a calm and healthy start to the day.

The range of provision meets users' needs well because, in addition to formal mechanisms for gaining the views of users, centre managers are knowledgeable about changing circumstances. For example, this has led to the introduction of language courses for users whose English is at an early stage of development and the 'We Live in England Now' programme, providing a wealth of information for families new to the country. The next planned development is to train staff in British Sign Language and to extend this to other users. Staff are being trained to ensure that they are able to support families in completing the imminent national census. The centre has been particularly successful in providing a wide range of parenting courses to meet differing needs, reflected in a comment, 'We are single parents so really need this support.'

Adult literacy and numeracy courses at varying levels are improving adult qualifications in addition to helping parents and carers to support their children's learning at home. These have been so successful that parents and carers are asking for more opportunities to understand how children learn as they progress further through school. Computer courses, primarily to help users set up their curriculum vitae, have been popular and a few parents and carers report that this has helped them to gain interviews for employment. Take up for first-aid training has been high and made possible through the crèche provision which is trusted by parents and carers. These qualifications achieved have proved useful in gaining employment and in developing skills to keep children safe. Parents and carers spoken with reported that this has been a significant factor in developing their confidence in their parenting skills. Staff are relentless in finding more ways to extend the scope of the centre's work and to engage with families with young children in the area who are vulnerable or who do not yet join in centre activity, for example by promoting the centre's activities through informal conversations in play areas. Parents and carers value that the centre regularly provides information and signposts alternative provision, such as a sleep clinic.

The centre was set up for daytime use only, but it is now recognised that this does not provide sufficiently for fathers and working parents and carers. Managers are giving consideration to how funding could be made available to extend provision. Close links with and close proximity to the Mottingham Community Learning Shop, and its involvement with Jobcentre Plus, are used well to provide a focus for helping people to be productive members of the community and look for employment.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The local authority maintains a close oversight of the centre through a number of decision-making bodies, with the Supporting Families Strategy Group taking overall strategic responsibility. The Area Steering Group, supported by the Bromley Children Project Board, has more direct operational responsibility. Within the centre's unique management structure, with each site under different direct operational management arrangements, accountability arrangements are clear and relationships between the different groups are professional and positive. Leaders with direct involvement in the centre's work are well represented on strategic groups and feel appropriately challenged and supported. The links through the area coordinator have ensured that Parent Forum members have been well informed about strategic development. Although parents and carers share and contribute ideas through evaluations that influence decision-making, they do not have enough formal involvement in governance or working with partners. Effective partnership working with other agencies has a positive impact on further developing services for children and families helping centre staff to make a contribution to local and national targets. Through data analysis, the centre is constantly evaluating the cost-effectiveness of its services. Premises are managed well on a day-to-day basis. The centre provides good value for money because of the good provision and positive outcomes for families.

The centre has developed well under the leadership of the Bromley Children's Centre Manager and the area coordinator. Interim arrangements, as the local authority changes management structures, have been managed well to ensure continuity and reduce concerns for centre staff and users. Partnership work with other partners, including the health service and local schools, is a real strength of the centre's work, ensuring that local residents have access to a wide range of purposefully commissioned programmes. The effective partnership between the centre and Mottingham Primary School is seen in the removal of barriers between the school and some hard to reach parents who now feel welcomed into the centre and the school. There is a shared drive and ambition. Staff have an accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for further development. The development plan identifies a relevant set of priorities and actions, although its use as a management tool is limited because of the lack of clear intended outcomes. The recently introduced data information system collates a wealth of relevant data, which is now beginning to provide useful information about the impact of activities on outcomes for families and children. The extent of this analysis is still to be fully realised as staff develop their understanding of the available information, but there is already evidence of rigorous use to prioritise activities to secure maximum impact.

Safeguarding policies and practices are given a high priority. All staff are fully aware of how to identify and take appropriate action to ensure children’s safety. Recruitment checks are robust and information recorded securely. Risk assessments are thorough and the centre is meticulous in implementing its policies to ensure that children’s welfare is of paramount importance. The centre actively promotes equality and celebrates diversity, for example by celebrating cultural festivals within sessions. Parents and carers of children with disabilities are supported well through the ‘Parents are Special Too’ programme. All groups are welcomed to the centre and good use is made of multilingual signage. Staff are developing their skills, for example in learning simple greetings in other languages to make everyone feel welcome and able to engage with the centre.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre’s policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the The Mottingham Children and Family Centre on 3 and 4 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall. We would like to thank all parents and carers and centre users who were present during the inspection and helped us to find out about how the work of the centre supports families in the area.

Many of you told us how much you value the activities in the centre sites and we agree that there is a good range of services which support you personally and help you feel part of a wider community. A number of you spoke of how the centre sessions have helped you to build your confidence as parents and carers. We saw how much you enjoy some of the sessions. The close working relationships between staff at the centre and staff from a wider range of professional groups help you to see the centre as a 'one-stop shop'. They work together well because they understand each other's roles and give you the best possible advice and support. Parents and carers new to the area appreciate that centre activities have helped them to develop friendships which help them to feel less isolated. The centres ensure that there is good publicity about activities, for example on the notice boards at local schools. This means that the centres are being used more and more and the range of events is increasing all the time.

The health clinics are particularly important in helping users to get to know more about the full range of the centre's work. Users find centre staff friendly and welcoming and appreciate that they try to make sure that each person has the individual support needed. The range of programmes is currently limited because staffing levels mean that the centre can only open occasionally in the evening or at weekends. Because the health services are based at the Castlecombe site, the facilities there are used to greater capacity than at the Mottingham site. We have asked the centre to try to increase the range of events at Mottingham, and to try to put on more events 'out of office hours' which would help and be of interest to fathers and working parents and carers.

You told us that you feel safe in the centre and value the programmes which help you to learn how to keep your children safe. For example, many of you spoke of how useful the first-aid training has been in helping you to feel confident in your parenting. Some of you told us that these courses have been useful in adding to your curriculum vitae (CV) and have proved valuable in obtaining work. The links with the Mottingham Learning Shop are also strong and used well to provide information about opportunities in the area. The centre's offer is carefully planned to make sure that there are programmes to reach a wide range of people in the area, for example the 'We Live in England Now' for parents new to Britain and the 'Parents are Special Too' group for children with disabilities and their parents and carers.

Users happily share their ideas about which activities they find useful because they feel that their views are listened to well and acted upon by centre staff. A few parents and carers take this a step further by joining the Parent Forum, which receives information about local authority meetings and planning. At present there are no representatives of the centre users on more strategic decision-making groups, and we have asked the local authority to find ways of achieving this. The information the centre collects through users' evaluations is used well to plan for the future, but at this stage has not been collected for long enough for staff to have been able to use it to monitor the activities which are of most value to users.

The centre is well managed and much has been achieved since it opened in 2009, particularly in the quality of partnership work to set up services and activities which are valued by families within the reach area. Centre staff and local authority managers have a good understanding of current strengths and areas for development. This is evidence of the centre's good capacity for ongoing improvement.

Thank you once again for the time you gave to speak to us during the inspection.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.