

Barking and Dagenham – North Locality

Marks Gate Community Centre, Rose Lane, Chadwell Heath, Essex, RM6 5NJ

Inspection dates	29–30 April 2014
Previous inspection date	Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:	Not applicable	
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This group of centres is good.

- The centres are welcoming and well organised, with good quality resources that are used well to meet community needs.
- The quality of services offered to improve education and employment prospects for adults is good.
- The centres make a significant and highly valued contribution to the local authority's early help and intervention strategy.
- Partnership working is a key strength. Staff have established very effective relationships with a wide range of partners, including in health, adult education and social care, which have a positive impact on reducing inequalities and improving families' well-being.
- Leaders and managers evaluate carefully the impact of the services they provide on improving the outcomes for families and children.
- Staff performance is well managed, and staff training is good.

It is not outstanding because:

- The centre group has insufficient impact on improving health outcomes for families and children.
- Too few families from the most deprived communities, including fathers and White British families, are fully engaged with the centres.
- The take up of free education places by eligible two-year-olds is not high enough.
- Locality leaders' and managers' skills in undertaking observation of staff at work are insufficiently critical, and they are unable to provide specific advice to staff on how to improve the quality of services.

What does the group need to do to improve further?

- Work closely with partners in health to improve health outcomes for children and families, particularly in increasing sustained breastfeeding rates, reducing obesity rates and reducing the number of parents smoking at the birth of their children.
- Increase the proportion of the most vulnerable children and families who engage with the services available to them, including fathers and White British families with particular reference to the uptake of two- and three-year-olds who have entitlement to free early education.
- Provide opportunities for all locality leaders' and managers' leaders to develop their observation skills, so that following the monitoring of activities they can provide more targeted feedback to staff and partners that lead to further improvement in the quality of services.

Information about this inspection

The inspection was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. The centres that comprise this group are Furze and Marks Gate.

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector carried out the inspection.

The inspectors held meetings with the locality managers, strategic lead manager, local authority managers, early intervention workers, members of the senior management board, the Chair and Vice Chair of children's centre community forum and the parents' forum. They met with key partners from health, education, adult learning and Jobcentre Plus and talked to a number of parents attending activities in the centres, and to volunteer workers.

Inspectors observed the centre's work, undertook joint observations, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including information about the safeguarding of families, evaluations completed by parents, the centre's self-evaluation and its plans for improvement.

The inspectors visited Active Age Centre, a local community facility for older residents used as an outreach centre for Furze Children's Centre and Furze Children's Centre itself.

Inspection team

Lead inspector, Deavon Baker-Oxley	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sue Crawford	Her Majesty's Inspector
Alan Comerford-Dunbar	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about the group

Barking and Dagenham - North Locality is a group of children's centres in Barking and Dagenham run by the local authority. The group is made up of two centres: Furze, a phase 2 children's centre, and Marks Gate, a phase 1 children's centre, with two temporary additional outreach venues (a local supermarket and Active Age Centre), and a permanent new satellite site at Robert Jeyes Library. One staff team works across the locality to provide services, with a shared leadership team. There is one senior management board, which includes key partners.

The children's centre group offers a range of services to meet its core purpose. Services are provided at each of the centres and the outreach venues. Outreach also takes place at local schools, nurseries and pre-school settings. The centres are open each weekday from 9.00am to 5.00pm for 51 weeks of the year.

The locality has two junior schools, two infant schools and one secondary school. Early years childcare at both centres is commissioned through a partner agency, London Early Years Foundation Nurseries. These providers are subject to different inspection arrangements. Reports can found at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>.

There are 1,716 children under five years of age living in the area the centres serve. This includes Chadwell Heath and Whalebone; both wards are among the smallest in the borough. Both centres are situated within the top 30% of the most deprived areas nationally. The centres serve a highly populated urban area. Around 35% of children are living in households dependent on workless benefits in Chadwell Heath, and 27% in Whalebone.

The majority of the population is White British, with small percentages of families from minority ethnic groups, the largest of these being Black African.

Children's skills when children start early years provision vary across the area, with communication and language being the weakest aspect.

The group has identified its main priority groups as lone parents, White British families, fathers, and teenage parents living in the most deprived areas.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The Marks Gate Children's Centre is housed in a community centre with a library and adult college. The centre is welcoming and at the heart of the community. The Furze Children's Centre is a satellite site. A large majority of families with young children are registered with the centres; this includes young teenage parents, lone parents and families with children with disabilities. There is good uptake of services for children referred to clinical services for communication and language support, with effective training of centre staff to support their language and communication development. Too few fathers and White British families are accessing services.
- The centre staff work closely with on-site nurseries to identify families needing support, and with local schools to help to prepare children for school. Early intervention workers observe parent-child interactions during sessions such as 'Toddler talk' to identify parents who need additional support.
- Most three-year-olds known to be eligible for free early years education have taken it up,

supporting improved learning and development and improving school readiness. In contrast, too few of the eligible two-year-olds living in the area are taking up their entitlement to early education to support their learning and development at this early age.

- Early intervention workers are effective in helping to target families to access services in community venues, baby clinics and hospitals. Good working relationships exist with social care staff, who refer families who are stepping down from child protection plans. Centre staff work effectively with midwives to increase access to services for expectant mothers, who are encouraged to register with the centre at an early stage.
- Adult engagement in further learning and their participation levels are good. A wide range of appropriate courses is offered for adults and parents including literacy, information and communication technology, healthy eating and 'babbling babes' (a play and communication group for parents and infants). Families can access a variety of parenting groups, such as domestic violence support. Centre staff respond well to the feedback they receive to improve the services offered.
- Those who attend the centre are very happy with the centre and staff. The centre has very clear and appropriate plans to introduce a new 'core offer' for all adults, including seven main components clearly aimed at improving their prospects of employment.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The services are well planned to meet the needs of families, and there is an appropriate range of good quality activities for those children and families who access these services. Partnership work with the on-site early years managers is good at both centres. This creates a positive impact for families needing additional support, with some sessions taking place in the nursery buildings, further improving collaborative working. Good partnerships with health visitors and early intervention work benefit the target families. Good partnership working reduces inequalities for families, improving their life chances.
- The monitoring of children's progress is good and shows improved outcomes for children attending regularly, compared to those that attend fewer than 12 sessions. The majority of children who access children's centre services have a speech and language delay, however most of these achieve expected levels of communication for their age when reviewed after a year. Parents report that centre services help children to be ready to attend school.
- Intervention and prevention work are effective. Early intervention workers are effective in instigating assessment processes to provide support, and in engaging other services such as housing and health. Early intervention workers are fully involved in multi-agency meetings where necessary, to ensure services are well matched to the needs of families, particularly those most in need of support. As a result, when problems and crises arise, intervention from early intervention workers and other professionals is swift and effective.
- Many parents from the target groups who have attended parenting programmes have been supported well, improving their ability to look after their children. The centre provides a number of appropriate activities, such as behaviour management sessions and a healthy eating workshop. Healthy snacks are provided at sessions.
- The centre has very good links with health workers, in particular community health workers and midwives. Some recent appointments to key positions are designed to lead to further improvement, but it is too early to judge their impact. As a result, many of the headline figures for health outcomes, such as sustained breastfeeding rates, obesity rates and parents smoking at the birth of their children, are disappointing and are below the national average.
- The quality of services to improve education and employment prospects for adults is good. A good proportion of adults are recruited onto relevant programmes. Quality assurance of the provision is effective, with clear tracking and measuring of its impact.
- A good number of families stated that the centre has supported them well. The centre has a very good process to employ volunteers, who have significant impact especially in helping with administrative support.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre is well managed by very committed leaders, who are supported by a highly motivated team.
- The local authority provides effective strategic leadership and management, with clear links between national and local priorities, and clear targets for engaging with target groups. Management of the centre's performance is thorough. Data are used effectively to track the numbers accessing the services and their impact. However, the centre's self-evaluation report is too descriptive, and the grades awarded are not supported by objective evidence.
- The local authority sets effective targets for performance management, using its 'performance framework'. This is used well in staff appraisals to set individual performance targets in line with local authority priorities, and helps to facilitate effective monitoring of staff performance. Effective regular supervision supports staff well. The centre manager provides good operational supervision on a regular basis, during which individual targets and achievements are reviewed during appraisals. However, leaders and managers are insufficiently critical when undertaking observation of staff at work, and so struggle to advise staff on how to improve quality.
- Centre partnerships operate very successfully in identifying families' and children's needs, and enabling early intervention. Clear service level agreements are in place with Jobcentre Plus, domestic and sexual violence support organisations, and mental health care. Partnership working with health, education and social care providers, including effective sharing of information to support families and children, is effective. The centre uses data effectively to provide evidence of the impact of its services.
- All staff delivering the centre services are appropriately qualified, and they are drawn from a range of professional backgrounds. Staff training is frequent and of good quality. Continuous professional development for volunteers is good, and includes a three-week pre-volunteering programme followed by progression onto National Vocational Qualification courses.
- Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous. Clear policies and comprehensive procedures promote the welfare of young children and reduce the risk of harm to families. Centre staff and partner agencies provide integrated and effective support to families, including children subject to child protection plans, looked after children, and children in need. Staff use the Common Assessment Framework process and other tools well to assess the needs of families in order to provide the appropriate levels of support.
- Members of the children's centre community forum are very committed, and represent the needs of the community by monitoring and reflecting these needs back to the centre. Members are very positive about the centre and its standing in the community.
- The centres make very good use of their physical resources and staff to provide good outcomes for parents and children.

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.

Group details

Unique reference number	80394
Local authority	Barking and Dagenham
Inspection number	440285
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,716
Centre leader	Mandeep Mahadeo
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	020 8724 2527 / 020 8270 6091
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This group consists of the following children's centres:

- 21227 Furze Children's Centre
- 23472 Marks Gate Children's Centre

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