

Cambridge Children's Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104847
Local Authority	Sefton
Inspection number	287048
Inspection dates	11–12 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Brian Padgett HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	0–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	92
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Julie Cliff
Headteacher	Mrs Susan Thomas
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2001
School address	Cambridge Road Bootle Merseyside L20 9LQ
Telephone number	0151 2825467
Fax number	0151 2915440

Age group	0–5
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

Cambridge Children's Centre is situated in the Derby ward of Sefton, close to Liverpool city centre. It developed from Cambridge Nursery School and became a children's centre in September 2006. It is one of seven children's centres in Sefton. It moved into its new, purpose-built accommodation in late April 2007. At the time of the inspection, groundwork to complete the outdoor areas was taking place. The induction of children into the rooms for babies and the 2 to 3 year-olds was at an early stage, and the centre continues to recruit childcare staff.

In common with children's centres elsewhere, Cambridge Children's Centre provides funded nursery education for 3 and 4 year-olds, childcare for children from birth to school age, and a 'one-stop-shop', where parents have access to advice and support from key professionals from a range of outside services, including healthcare and adult education.

Children's centres mostly serve areas of significant social and economic disadvantage. Cambridge Children's Centre is no exception, and the Derby ward is amongst the 10% most disadvantaged in the country. However, although many of the children come from needy families, the centre provides for families from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. Nearly all children are of White British heritage. A high proportion of children, about one in four, has learning difficulties or disabilities. The nursery class is a designated centre within the local authority for 3 and 4 year-olds with severe special educational needs. Currently, six such children attend the centre.

The centre has been awarded the Basic Skills Quality Mark and Investors in People status. It has received a school achievement award and holds Quality and Inclusion Marks from the local authority. These awards and accreditations were achieved by the then Cambridge Nursery School.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Cambridge Children's Centre already provides well for its children and parents. It has some outstanding features. The building is fresh and new and is a source of pride within the community. However, it is its ethos that people value most. The old nursery school from which the centre developed had a high reputation within the community for the quality of its welcome and its care for children and parents. These qualities have been successfully transferred in full to the new building.

Children in the nursery class for 3 and 4 year-olds achieve well. Many enter nursery with very low starting points, especially children with a range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities, some of which are severe. They make good progress over the three to six terms they attend the class, particularly in their personal and social development and in their communication, language and early literacy skills.

Alongside the children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are able children and they also make good progress because the early years practitioners are exceptionally effective. They have a thorough knowledge of each child's individual needs and are skilled in settling and encouraging children whatever their ability. Practitioners throughout the centre provide a wealth of interesting experiences to stimulate children's learning. They are limited at present in what outdoor experiences they can offer to children because the grounds are not yet finished. However, the school has good quality plans in place to replace the excellent outdoor facilities enjoyed by the previous nursery school. It is too early to judge the quality and impact of the provision for the 0 to 3 year-olds. The children have only been in school for two weeks', numbers of children are being built up and practitioners are still being recruited. Nevertheless, this new venture is off to a good start and is being led and managed well.

The centre provides outstanding care, guidance and support for children. The level of care for each child could hardly be bettered. This is a great strength of the centre and one that is fully appreciated by parents. It enables children of all backgrounds and capabilities to make good progress in their personal development, their enjoyment of learning and in their social development. Children are at ease in their surroundings and keen to explore them. Practitioners are patient and watchful, always ready to intervene positively to support learning, develop children's language and help them in their social development.

A good start has been made in what the centre provides for the community. Family learning was already well established in the nursery school but the potential to involve parents within the new centre is so much greater and the staff and agencies supporting families have been quick to realise this. Even though the development of the broader work of the centre is at an early stage, a wide range of health care professionals, including health visitors, midwives and speech and language therapists, use the centre, providing easy access to professional advice and support for children, their parents and the community. Because the transition has been accomplished so well, the management is in a strong position to accelerate plans to develop this aspect of the centre's work.

The level of leadership and management is of the highest order. The headteacher has transferred all that was excellent from the old setting to the new very smoothly; has guided and overseen the development of the new centre; and worked very effectively with partners and outside agencies. The staff team has expanded considerably, from six in the old nursery to twenty in the new centre. The headteacher is building her new team of staff and practitioners well, so

that all share in her vision for the future. In all of this she has received good support from the governing body, the local authority, local schools and partnerships, and the many funded and voluntary bodies that contribute to the community. Because of what has already been achieved, the commitment of staff and the strength of the partnerships, the centre has an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the centre's grounds to provide a stimulating outdoor environment for learning.
- Accelerate plans to develop the broader remit of the centre's work with families and children.
- Continue to develop the provision for the 0 to 3 year-olds.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children's achievement in the nursery class is good. Standards, as indicated by the children's levels of development when compared to those typical of children of their age, are generally below average. However, the majority of children make good progress from their starting points when they enter the class. They are working within the appropriate developmental band for their age (the blue stepping stones) when they transfer to the Reception classes in the associated primary schools.

Children make best progress in their personal and social development and in elements of English: early reading, writing, speaking and listening. The centre's assessment records indicate that children make less progress in their mathematical development and this is currently a focus for improvement. Family learning sessions take place in the centre where practitioners and tutors work alongside parents to help them understand the mathematics their children are learning. These sessions often involve parents working with their children during the school day. They are very effective for parents and their children. The centre is concerned that children are making less progress in physical development than children in previous years and is therefore making the completion of the groundwork a priority.

Several of the children attending the nursery class are bright and capable. The nursery class practitioners arrange special challenges for these children within the more general work of the class. For example, while the majority of a group was reading the traditional story of 'The Three Little Pigs', a more able child was introduced to an alternative story, where little wolves were the victims of a large pig. The child was able to appreciate the humour in the change of role and to see events from different perspectives.

Children in the 2 to 3 year old room have only been admitted to the centre in the last two weeks'. The provision is developing. However, even at this early stage, children are settled and confident in exploring the learning experiences provided for them in their new rooms.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children's personal development is good, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The care and support of the practitioners, the warmth of their relationships with children and the quality of the activities made available to them ensures that most children develop good attitudes to learning and behave well. Some children come from difficult home backgrounds and others have challenging behaviour because of their special educational needs. They all make at least good and occasionally excellent progress.

Children are making good progress towards all of the elements of the outcomes for children included in the government's 'Every Child Matters' agenda: learning how to stay safe, be healthy, to enjoy learning and achieve well, to make a positive contribution to their community, and to build secure foundations for their future working lives by developing the basic skills they will need.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning in the nursery class is outstanding. It is too early to make a judgement on the teaching in the 0 to 3 rooms, although practitioners there have got off to a good start with their new children, who have settled quickly. Practitioners for the youngest children are beginning to assess their needs, build up records of the progress children make and experiment with the learning activities they provide.

The early years practitioners are experienced and well qualified. Their commitment to professional development goes well beyond that seen in most schools. They create carefully planned, high quality learning experiences within the classroom and in the covered areas outside, which children are free to explore. In addition, a number of learning opportunities on a theme are provided, usually stimulated by a visit to say, a farm or a zoo. Much of the direct teaching and assessment takes place within these activities, aimed at developing children's social skills, language, early reading, and mathematics, for example. Children with learning difficulties are included in all that is provided. Practitioners are patient and gentle with children. The children are praised and encouraged and grow in confidence, independence and self-esteem.

Practitioners are rigorous in assessing children's progress. They share their views of children's learning each day, record progress, discuss and make plans for the following day. Informal notes are transferred to more formal records set against national guidelines. This enables practitioners and the headteacher to develop an accurate overview of each child's progress and stage of development.

The centre makes excellent use of the support available to it; for example, from the local Excellence in Cities partnership, to fund excursions for children and to provide teaching programmes to promote language development. Practitioners work very successfully with agencies that promote partnership with parents and their involvement in their children's learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is of good quality. In the nursery class it is firmly rooted in the national guidance for children at the Foundation Stage (3 to 5 years) and the 0 to 3 practitioners base their developing practice on the nationally recommended guidance in 'Birth to 3 Matters'. The curriculum for all the children in the centre is ultimately determined by their individual needs and interests. Opportunities for children to learn through play in sand, or water, for example, are always present. These are extended imaginatively by opportunities for children to engage in activities connected with themes that create a focus for children's learning, and a means of learning about the world around them. These are developed very imaginatively and adapted as children's interest develops. There is a strong focus on health in the curriculum, and snack

time is an important part of each session, generating much useful language and learning, as well as promoting healthy eating.

The centre has compensated well for the temporary loss of outdoor play, by using the nearby park and making good use of the verandas onto which each room opens. However, practitioners are aware of how important the outdoors is for the learning of young children and they look forward to the completion of the groundwork.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support for children are outstanding. All who are involved with the centre insist that this is its key strength, carried over, intact, from the previous nursery school. All children receive the highest quality of care, and this includes the most vulnerable children and those with severe learning difficulties, for whom such care is life changing. Each child has a key worker; in the baby room each child has two key workers, a first and a deputy. Procedures such as those for safeguarding, child protection, and health and safety risk assessments are rigorous. Practitioners work closely together, sharing information about children frequently and involving parents and carers fully. The headteacher and her reception staff are welcoming and parents feel able to come to the centre at any time with their concerns.

Guidance for learning is of high quality. Practitioners know exactly at what stage of development children are, the gains they have made and the next steps for their further development. Records of progress are carefully completed. Moreover, practitioners know the children very well as individuals.

The quality and extent of the partnerships is first rate. The nursery was the local authority's natural choice to develop into a children's centre because of its existing commitment to partnership working. Facilitated by the new building, partnership working is rapidly developing. The centre has strong links with parents and carers, health care professionals, other schools - including good transition arrangements - and the local Excellence in Cities cluster, and funded and voluntary agencies for family support and adult learning. It is now in a strong position to extend and broaden these further to meet the 'core offer' of children's centres in greater depth; for example, in extending its outreach work and its 'wrap-around' care for 0 to 5 year-olds, and to help get parents back to work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher and her staff have completed the transition from nursery school to children's centre very well, involving the demolition of the school and the building of the new centre. Users of the centre are full of praise for the new facilities and say it feels the same as the old school, which pleases them greatly. The centre's leadership has the confidence of the parents and the wider community and its reputation is attracting parents from outside the immediate area.

The headteacher provides excellent leadership. The ethos of the centre is the direct result of her approach to children and to the community. She leads by example. For instance, she encourages the early years practitioners to acquire extra qualifications and she meanwhile, is

studying for the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership, the definitive qualification for the heads of children's centres.

The number of centre staff is much larger than the staff required in the old nursery. The headteacher is building the new team carefully, delegating responsibility to senior practitioners, and making sure that the vision for the development of the centre is shared by all. The work of the centre is monitored and evaluated carefully, particularly the impact on children and parents of the courses provided by the centre.

The governors provide good support for the centre. They are keen to broaden their skills to meet the new challenges they face. Such is the progress made by the leadership and management, they should re-evaluate the modest development plans currently in place.

Based on what has already been achieved, the high quality of leadership, the excellent work of practitioners and the quality of the partnerships with others, the centre is capable of going from strength to strength.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A**Leadership and management**

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

A little while ago, I came to your school to see how well you are learning. I came into all your classes. I don't think many of you noticed me because you were very busy playing and working with your teachers. But I watched you. I was especially interested seeing some of you build a brick house for one of the little pigs and some of you dig up the potatoes from your garden.

I never saw the old Cambridge Nursery School. I understand you were sad about leaving your old school. But you are very lucky to have such a wonderful new building that gives you all the space you need to learn in.

Although I was very pleased to see how lovely the building is, I was really looking at how well you are learning and growing up. I believe you are happy at school and doing well, all of you. You are getting a good start to your education. This is because you have expert teachers and an expert headteacher who really care about you and your families. They are determined to help you do your very best.

Your parents can be proud of your school and confident it is getting better and better as it settles into its new building.