

Inspection report for Peppermint Children's Centre

Local authority	Croydon
Inspection number	361067
Inspection dates	6–7 July 2010
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Centre governance	The local authority
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Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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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 two of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with the centre's managers, a local authority representative, a trustee from the executive committee, members of the advisory board, and representatives from the centre's partners including from health and the housing association. They had informal discussions with parents and children. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation including case studies, children's records, a range of key policies, the centre's self evaluation documents, its service plan and action plan, and data about the people who use the centre.

Information about the centre

Peppermint Children's Centre was designated in 2006 having been set up originally as one of a cluster of four centres in the Broad Green Local Sure Start Programme. Some of its staff continue to work across the centres. It is co-located with a healthy living centre providing a range of health services including a GP surgery. NHS Croydon is one of its main partners. Other services are provided in partnership between the local authority and Canterbury Road Sure Start Centre Ltd, (CRSSC Ltd) a non-profit-making voluntary organisation. The nursery provides day care from 07.30 to 18.00 for 50 weeks a year. A pre-school operates each morning during term time. The centre offers family support services and various drop-in sessions and adult courses. It provides an after-school activity club on Monday to Thursday and holiday activities as well as a youth club on two evenings a week. The centre's computer suite is open to the whole community.

The centre is currently undergoing much change in its management structure and governance. The head of centre, children's centre and extended services manager and the deputy manager all took up their roles in April of this year. The head of centre is also head of the Canterbury Road Centre. The executive committee of CRSSC Ltd, which is the governing body of the centre, is currently extending its membership and has been joined by three new trustees since April. Currently CRSSC Ltd is changing its name and re-registering at companies house as 'Acorns to Oaks Ltd' to reflect the wider range of services provided to the community. A separate

advisory board of representatives from a number of community partners has been set up within the last year to provide advice and suggestions about activities to meet the needs of the community.

The centre serves an area of high social and economic disadvantage. The area is culturally and ethnically diverse with a mix of Black Caribbean, White British and Asian families. Much of the housing is temporary accommodation and so the population is transitory. Many of the children attending the nursery and pre-school provision have low levels of language and communication skills. Around a quarter have additional learning needs and/or developmental delay. A similar proportion speaks English as an additional language.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Much of what the centre provides is of good quality. The early identification and support for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their families is an example. Family workers often go the extra mile to support parents in times of crisis. The centre can point to some individual success stories for children and families who need the most support and whose circumstances might be a barrier to improving the quality of their lives. Partnership working is strong and enables the various services to work together to target specific support to some families who need it the most. The centre is making a big difference to the lives of parents and to the life chances of its younger users. Consequently outcomes are good. However, the centre does not yet reach sufficient numbers of users and not enough families are making use of the general activities on offer.

Parents themselves feel welcome in the centre. They value the opportunities provided by sessions such as ‘stay ‘n’ play’; evaluations of these sessions are generally positive. The ‘family learning weeks,’ and events such as the picnic in Beddington Park, are much enjoyed by those who participate. However, attendance at sessions is sometimes low. Some participants register to attend a course but do not then turn up and/or drop out. The centre has no clear mechanism for following

up such issues to find out why this has happened in order to make changes to its services in the future. Neither does the centre track and follow-up the impact of the training sessions for adults. The absence of a parents' forum means that the centre cannot gather the views of users in a formal way and this restricts opportunities for users to decide on the services that they need. Informal canvassing of the views of parents using the health services show that some are unaware of the other services available in the centre. Consequently, the centre's plans to extend its work in reaching out to members of the community are timely.

The centre's leaders are aware of the issues facing the community the centre serves. Although the centre is successful in celebrating the diversity of the community it serves leaders know that there is more to do to encourage certain groups, such as the Asian families in the West Thornton area, to attend activities regularly. Policies and procedures for safeguarding children and families are thorough and much of the centre's day-to-day practice is good. Record keeping is not always sufficiently rigorous to provide a clear picture of the actions taken in individual cases.

Systems for evaluating how well the centre is doing are developing securely and leaders know what could be improved. Monitoring of the quality of provision is thorough and leads to the development of action plans for each service and for each member of staff. However, the data provided for the centre does not always give leaders the information they need to be able to make informed decisions about how to develop services. The centre's action plan sets out appropriate actions but does not set sharp targets for each of its services that can be used to measure success. The absence of such targets makes it difficult for the executive committee to challenge managers and hold them to account for the centre's success. The number of significant changes at the centre with new staff in the nursery, new leaders and managers, and new trustees mean that the governance and lines of accountability are not entirely clear to all in the centre. Nonetheless all are committed to the centre's work and to its future in serving the needs of its diverse community.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve systems for collecting information on the impact of the centre's provision on the people using it in order to target services better to their needs.
- Develop the programme of outreach work to:
 - publicise the centre's programmes,
 - to engage a wider range of the community in using the services on offer,
 - enable users to be involved in making decisions about the services they need.
- Embed the new management structure ensuring that monitoring is rigorous, and that the centre's action plans contain sharp, measurable targets to enable leaders and managers to evaluate the success of their work and to enable trustees to challenge the centre's managers and hold them to account for what

the centre achieves.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for the children and families who use the centre are good. The centre is beginning to develop systems for evaluating the impact of its work and available evidence demonstrates that the centre's work is improving the outcomes for its users. Parents report that the 'lunch and learn' sessions have helped them to introduce healthier options for their children and shown them how to manage their child's behaviour at meal times. Partnerships with health professionals enable users to have access to a good range of information which is raising their awareness of general health. For example, blood pressure checks and breast screening were available during community fun-day events. Young people benefit from a variety of informative workshops on topics such as safe sex and gun crime, which help them make informed decisions in all aspects of their life. Parents, children and other users feel safe when coming to the centre. Children in the childcare facilities move around the provision safely. In the pre-school garden, for example, they know the boundaries marked out by the bright cones and meet the adults' expectations of good behaviour. Parents have developed a greater understanding of first aid by attending the 'First Aid for babies' courses held at the centre. This has increased their knowledge of how to deal with accidents in the home and what to do if their baby becomes unwell.

Secure systems ensure that staff in different services identify children who may be at risk or who may require additional support in their learning. Information is shared and staff refer children and families to services within the centre to meet their needs. Users say they feel less isolated as a result of using the services provided by the centre. The 'Every Child a Talker' programme has made a significant difference to children's language development and social skills over a short period. The 'Stay and play' sessions which parents and carers attend with their children has helped increase their understanding of how to help their children learn through play. Parents enjoy the opportunity to meet others and to use different resources. Parents report an increase in their confidence as a result of the self-esteem course 'Stepping up'. This and other courses have enabled users to continue with training to gain qualifications and, for some, have resulted in a return to employment. Users communicate their views regularly after sessions and a few contribute to decisions about how services might be developed. One parent values the support she and her family have received and now 'wants to give something back' so has joined the advisory board.

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	2

their personal and social development	
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre is good at assessing the needs of the children and families who use its services. Thorough systems for assessing children's needs ensure early intervention for those children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Additional advice through the local authority's inclusion team ensures that nursery staff and parents adopt a consistent approach to helping these children to learn. Adults in the nursery and pre-school use assessments and observations well to plan for the next steps in children's learning and, as a result, children make good progress. Transition arrangements for children starting school are effective at helping them to settle to their new environment. Good links with health professionals and housing associations ensure vulnerable families have access to appropriate services. The range of services available meets the specific needs of those currently attending but the centre's staff recognise that more needs to be done to reach out to the wider community and to specific groups to increase attendance rates and to develop further the range of services the centre provides.

The centre surveys current users and gathers information from the wider community on the services they would like through flyers, questionnaires and at community events. For example, parents and other users recently attended a computer course which was provided in response to a specific request from the community. The centre provides crèche facilities to enable parents to attend such courses. Nonetheless, participation rates for some courses and sessions are low and the centre does not yet have systems to identify why this is so.

The family support team identifies the specific needs of families and then tailors sessions accordingly or signposts parents to external services or to services at other centres within the Broad Green ward to meet these needs. Examples include parenting courses, and Saturday sessions for fathers. Home visits take place to help those feeling isolated to attend the centre's activities. Sessions are held to help parents complete school admission forms, for example, and one child was offered a place in the nursery until a school place was allocated. Good use is made of the centre's facilities; for example teenagers use the internet café to complete their homework. The youth club and after-school sessions are popular and provide a range of activities including trips to the Science Museum and street dance sessions. One young person reports that the youth club is good and provides an alternative to playing on the streets.

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	3
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?

3

The day-to-day management of the centre is well organised and the centre's activities generally run smoothly. Centre staff work well as a team and show a strong commitment to the centre's work in making a difference to the children, families and other users. However, the effectiveness of leadership and management and the centre's capacity to improve is currently satisfactory because of two factors: one is the number of significant changes to staff roles and the newness of the centre's management team; the other is the rigour of self-evaluation and the sharpness of planning for the future.

Members of the executive committee bring a range of expertise and experience to their governance roles. For example, expertise in finance and personnel is used well when making decisions about resources to ensure the centre achieves satisfactory value for money. Recent changes to the leadership and management of the centre and to the membership of the committee has blurred lines of accountability which are not clearly understood by all staff.

Leaders are accurate in their evaluation of what the centre needs to do improve. Through regular monitoring of services staff draw up action plans to bring about improvement by, for example, developing the range of activities for nursery children in the outside areas. The action plan for the whole centre identifies clearly the right areas to improve, but targets are not sharp enough to help the centre's managers or the executive committee to measure improvements or the impact of its services on the outcomes for users. In part this is because the data provided for the centre does not always show clearly which groups have used the different services.

The membership of the recently established advisory board reflects the centre's strong partnership working. It includes representatives from housing, health, youth work, Jobcentre Plus, residents from the community and two parents. Its role is to discuss the needs of the community and to decide what action is needed to shape services. For example, recent discussions have been around how to develop a much-needed play park. At the forthcoming fun day, funded by the housing associations, board members will consult with the community about future developments while providing activities such as face painting and the opportunity for young people to mix

music.

Staff have undertaken relevant training in safeguarding children. Courses include domestic violence so they know when to recognise potential concerns. Policies and procedures are clear and meet requirements, including those on recruiting and vetting staff. Staff have a thorough approach to health and safety practice. However, on occasions record keeping for individual children does not demonstrate whether rigorous action has been taken. The centre's managers recognise that outreach work is not yet reaching the wider community and have plans to develop this. A recent 'International day' was popular with parents who commented that it was a really good opportunity to meet others from different backgrounds and to try different foods.

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	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
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	3

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Peppermint Children's Centre on 7 and 8 July 2010. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

The centre offers its parents and other users a good level of support, particularly when they are feeling troubled. Staff in the centre work together well with other services in the health centre and in the local authority to make sure children and families who need special support get the right kind of help. The centre makes a big difference to such families. The children who come to the nursery and pre-school enjoy the activities they do and are learning lots of new things each day. The staff there look after them well and watch carefully what they are learning so they can plan different things for them to do.

The centre gives good advice to its younger users in the youth club to help them make decisions about their lives. Parents told us that they enjoy sessions such as 'stay 'n' play' which help them find out how to help their children learn as they play. Events such as the picnic in Beddington Park and the 'International Day' are popular because parents get to meet other people from the community. Some parents said that it is a shame the centre is not used by more people. The centre's managers have plans to do more work to reach out to other people in the community who might benefit from what the centre has to offer. Inspectors agree that this is an area that needs to improve. The centre also intends to start a parents' forum to find out parents' views and to get suggestions from parents and other users about sessions that they would like.

The centre's managers try to measure how successful the different services are so that they can make improvements. They do not always have as much information as they need to help them do this. Inspectors have suggested that they need to find better ways of checking on the success of the different programmes so that they can plan ahead. The managers have to report how well they are doing to the executive committee - this is the group of people who have overall responsibility for the centre. They are all volunteers who meet regularly with the centre's managers but they, too, need more information to help them ask the right questions and to challenge managers to make the centre more effective. The centre's plans for the future need to have more measurable targets so that everyone will know when they have succeeded.

There have been a lot of changes at the centre recently. Nearly everyone in a senior post is new to their role. The name of the voluntary company that provides the services is changing too. The executive committee also has new members. Not surprisingly, not everyone in the centre is clear about how all these changes will affect them. But on one thing everyone who works in the centre is clear - they all want to do their best for the children, parents and other users in the community.

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