

Inspection report for The All About Centre

Local authority	Essex
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Reporting inspector	Jon Bowman HMI

Centre leader	Claire Coke
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	The All About Centre Leinster Road Basildon SS15 5NX
Telephone number	01268 418523
Fax number	01268 418523
Email address	claire.coke@essex.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	James Hornsby High School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Laindon Nursery

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, representatives of the local authority, partners, parents, frontline staff and volunteers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

The All About Children's Centre is a phase one centre designated in March 2006 and delivers the full core offer. The centre is located in the grounds of the local high school, sharing premises with the 50-place linked day nursery and a local voluntary organisation.

The centre is currently led by the local authority and governance is through an advisory board shared with the Laindon Park Children's Centre. Planned changes in the governance of the centre are imminent. The centre has had a number of management changes in recent years. The current centre coordinator was appointed in August 2011. Services are delivered by five children's centre workers (two of whom are shared with a neighbouring centre), three outreach workers, one data officer and one administrator.

The centre serves children and families in the Lee Chapel North Ward of Basildon which includes eight super output areas, six of which fall within the 30% most disadvantaged communities nationally. There are 1206 children aged under five years and their families living within the centre's reach area. The area is characterised by low aspirations and educational attainment. A high proportion of families are of White British heritage. Levels of unemployment are high among adults. On entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage, children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age.

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 families

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The All About Children's Centre is a satisfactory centre. After a period of change the centre is beginning to re-establish itself within the community and new users are being attracted each month. The new coordinator has provided sound leadership, quickly ensuring a well-ordered and well-managed centre with a clear purpose. It provides a safe, welcoming and friendly environment for users, many of whom take good advantage of the services on offer.

Outcomes are satisfactory overall. However, for those families who attend the centre they achieve well and gain numerous benefits, such as ideas for creative play at home, advice on weaning and on diet. Children are prepared effectively for their next steps in learning and develop well as independent and confident learners. However, the centre does not engage with enough families whose circumstances make them vulnerable or from the centre's target groups. The range of programmes supports the health and well-being of users effectively. Provision for users who are seeking training or employment is underdeveloped. Despite this, users welcome and value the support that staff offer them.

The centre has satisfactory capacity to further improve. While a number of significant improvements have been made in a short space of time, there is still much to achieve to sustain and build on these. Data and information are beginning to be used effectively to inform managers about the strengths and weaknesses of the centre and where there are gaps in provision. These are well known to managers and leaders, but strategies to improve them are in their early stages of implementation. The written self-evaluation is accurate, but the commentary is not always clearly underpinned by evidence. Parents who spoke with inspectors were insightful when commenting on the work of the centre. While their views are regularly sought on their experiences, they are not yet sufficiently engaged in the development of the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The centre and its partners should take concerted action to:
 - engage a greater number of users from target groups and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable
 - provide effective support for those seeking training or employment opportunities.
- Implement measures to engage users in the development of the centre.
- Ensure that judgements in the written self-evaluation are consistently supported by all of the available evidence so that the evaluation is comprehensive.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Programmes support users to develop their health and well-being effectively. Highly popular swimming courses delivered in partnership with the high school ensure regular exercise and promote water safety well. As one parent said, 'Swimming is brilliant!' Baby massage sessions encourage mothers to bond with their babies. The healthy lunch club encourages healthy eating well. Active play sessions such as 'Tumble Kids', and good use of the garden area promote children's physical development well. However, obesity among children in the area remains high, and breastfeeding rates are low.

The centre provides a safe environment for all. Users feel safe. Effective work is undertaken that helps build parents' understanding of their children's behaviour. They develop their skills well in using techniques to manage their children's behaviour appropriately. Many families in need of additional help who are engaged by the centre achieve good outcomes. Parents report improvements in the daily routines of their children such as at bed- and mealtimes. Many parents who attend learn to act as good role models for their children. The engagement of parents who need additional help through the use of the Common Assessment Framework is underdeveloped. The safeguarding and complaints policy for users is not easily accessible to them.

Children enjoy attending the centre; 'Is it a centre day?' they ask excitedly. Parents learn new activities that support well their children's development, such as through the use of counting games. Creative and messy play is enjoyed by all. One parent commented, 'Children can make as much mess as they want and get away with it!' Children are well prepared for their next steps to nursery or pre-school through good support for their transition. They develop their confidence and understand boundaries and routines well. The proportion of children reaching the nationally expected level at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage is improving, although it is still low in some of the most deprived areas within the locality.

Children demonstrate good behaviour at the centre. Positive and purposeful relationships are evident between users and staff. Good opportunities are made for parents to identify their own needs during sessions, and they offer each other support and help. There is a satisfactory range of opportunities for users to offer

their views on sessions and programmes. As a result, some sessions are amended and adapted to better meet their needs. Parents help at one-off events such as 'Family Fun Days'.

Some users are supported effectively in undertaking training. However, concerted action to secure employment and training outcomes for users is not well prioritised by the centre and its partners. Young parents receive support through outreach work at a local foyer, and adults take part in numeracy and literacy courses delivered locally. Seven parents from the reach area are training to become 'Pregnancy Pals' and 'Birth Buddies' so that they can offer support to others in the locality. There is no direct input at the centre from Jobcentre Plus to support adults seeking employment.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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

How good is the provision?

3

The centre meets the needs of the community reasonably well. Assessment of needs in the wider community is underway. A useful mapping of programmes has been undertaken, identifying gaps in provision. The use of services by target groups is well known by managers. The centre is developing strategies to ensure that programmes and services fully reflect the centre's mission. Those who attend the centre regularly take good advantage of the range of programmes on offer. One parent said, 'I love it here! My daughter has improved so much. It's the best place in the world!' The number of families using the centre, including those who live in the most disadvantaged areas, is increasing steadily. The promotion of the centre through use of the internet is underdeveloped.

Staff have been supported well in developing their knowledge of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Programmes are now mostly planned and structured well and there is good consideration of how they can best support children's development. Staff act as good role models and help parents learn how to support their children's learning effectively. Achievements by users are recognised through awarding

certificates for completing some programmes. The centre recognises the need to better capture the progress and development that children make.

Users value highly the support that they receive from staff at the centre. As one stated, 'The staff are a credit to the centre.' Where the centre supports those families with higher levels of need, it makes a good contribution to the safety and well-being of children and their parents. Staff are approachable and contribute well to the informal but purposeful environment at the centre. The breadth of support available to users is strengthened where key partners offer specialist services on site and alongside staff from the centre. A reasonable range of information for parents and carers is displayed throughout the centre, although some is in need of updating.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Governance arrangements are satisfactory. The advisory board is led well by a local headteacher and meets regularly. The board is beginning to routinely consider information and performance data about the centre so that it can offer appropriate challenge to inform the centre's development. However, parents from the reach area are not yet involved in the board. The recent self-evaluation of the centre was not scrutinised by the board or local authority.

The centre is led and managed well on a day-to-day basis by the centre coordinator. She has quickly succeeded in developing a well-understood and shared vision for the centre. Regular staff meetings, supervision and good communication ensure that staff are involved well in the development of the centre. She has ensured that management information is routinely gathered, identified gaps in provision and has begun to develop plans to tailor services more effectively. She has quickly grasped where the centre's strengths and areas for development lie. The written self-evaluation highlights those key areas well, but the judgements are not always supported appropriately by evidence. Some targets in the centre's development plan are not sufficiently specific, making it difficult to judge the progress made against them. All of the programmes delivered are evaluated routinely, although these evaluations are not always brought together sufficiently to evaluate the outcomes for users. The centre has highlighted the need to improve the effectiveness of these.

The good-quality premises and resources available are used well. Resources, including staff and equipment are shared well between agencies and support the

programmes delivered effectively. Information on each programme is gathered that helps assess whether they offer value for money. However, some sessions have too many staff present. There is a good focus on staff development and training. The centre offers satisfactory value for money.

Equality and diversity are promoted satisfactorily. Users are made to feel welcome and all activities are free. For those who attend, their individual needs are mostly met well. The crèche ensures good access to services for parents. Resources and displays around the centre reflect and promote equality and cultural diversity well. However, the proportion of users from minority ethnic groups is low and, while this has been identified by the centre, strategies to better engage these groups are at their very early stages of implementation. The attainment gap between children from low-income families and the rest is closing.

Arrangements to safeguard users are satisfactory. Appropriate health and safety checks are routinely undertaken and all sessions are assessed for risks. All staff have up-to-date Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks and three-yearly re-checks are carried out. All staff have undertaken appropriate safeguarding training and know well what to do should they have any concerns over the welfare of users.

The centre has developed some strong and effective partnerships that help extend the breadth of provision well. Established work with health visitors is leading to new programmes being developed. Links with the local high school enrich the programme offered very well. The centre and early years providers in the area share information where appropriate to better support children and their families. However, some key partnerships are underdeveloped and this inhibits the extent to which the centre engages with families whose circumstances make them vulnerable or who are experiencing crisis. Parents are not yet sufficiently involved in the development of the centre. Plans to re-launch the parents' forum are in place.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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

Laindon Nursery was judged to be outstanding at its inspection in September 2008. This finding contributed to the children's centre inspection and report.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the All About Children's Centre on 24 and 25 January 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We very much enjoyed our visit to your children's centre and would like to thank all of you who gave your time to speak to us and tell us your experiences of using the centre. Your views have helped inform us of how well the centre is doing and we have mentioned some of your comments in the report.

The centre provides a safe environment for you and your children. Most activities are planned and delivered well and provide good opportunities for children and adults to play and learn together. Swimming and sessions where children enjoy physical play are particularly popular. An increasing number of families are being attracted to the centre but some, including those who need additional help and support, are not yet engaged well enough by the centre. This is one reason that we judged the centre as being satisfactory. In addition, there is not enough support for those in the community who wish to undertake further training or seek employment opportunities.

The new coordinator has done a good job, quickly ensuring that the centre runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and is going in the right direction. She is supported well by the staff team whose help is very much appreciated by those who attend the centre. You are often asked your views on the programmes you attend and these are listened and responded to by staff. However, there is scope for your greater involvement in the running and development of the centre. The coordinator has identified well what is good about the centre's work and what areas need strengthening. In the centre's written evaluation of its own performance these areas are not always backed up by good evidence. In the areas where we have found

improvements are needed, we have made recommendations to help the centre and its partners provide a better service for you and the wider community.

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