

Inspection report for Crown Lane Children's Centre

Local authority	Lambeth Council
Inspection number	383419
Inspection dates	23–24 February 2012
Reporting inspector	Steve Nelson

Head of Centre	Mary Devlin
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Crown Lane Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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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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.

An inspection of the co-located/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, the local authority, the children's centre manager and members of the advisory board. They met with a number of representatives of services who work through the children's centre, including health visitors and the outreach workers. Inspectors spoke to groups of parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation, development plan, user evaluations and case study information.

Information about the centre

Crown Lane Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre that was established in 2008. It provides full core purpose provision. It operates in the Knights Hill ward from one site based within Crown Lane Primary School.

The governing body of the school oversees the centre's work and the advisory board acts as a steering group. The advisory board consists of representatives from partner organisations and key stakeholders that work with the children's centre, the local authority and parents.

The majority of the families who use the centre are of White British, African and Caribbean heritage. A growing number of families using the centre are of Eastern European and Asian origin. The reach area is one of the 30% most deprived wards nationally. The children's centre has 722 children under five in its reach area. About 20% of children and adults who use the centre come from homes that are dependent on benefits. When they start early years provision, the majority of

children have skills, knowledge and abilities that are below those expected for their age.

The range of activities offered by the centre includes baby and toddler development checks, antenatal support, breastfeeding support, drop-in playgroups and fathers/male carers groups. The centre has links with health visitors, community midwives, speech therapists, nutritionists and other specialist professionals. It signposts families to a range of providers that offer adult education, volunteering opportunities, and activities designed to support parents and carers back into employment and training. The centre opens 48 weeks each year on weekdays from 8am to 6pm.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The centre manager conveys a strong sense of purpose and direction. She demonstrates effective organisational and communication skills, valuing the work of everyone. Consequently, on a day-to-day basis, activities run smoothly. Good outcomes for children and families are underpinned by effective provision. The quality of care, guidance and support offered to all families is excellent. Highly skilled and experienced staff work in a sensitive and person-centred way to identify and respond to the individual needs of families.

Parents and carers feel comfortable in the centre and know they will get a warm welcome from the staff. One user expressed a view that was typical of many others: ‘The staff go the extra mile. They make you feel really at ease.’

Good prioritisation of safeguarding ensures all children and families are safe. Good procedures are in place, and parents say they feel safe at the centre and that their children are well cared for. The quality and range of services offered meet the needs of the majority of the users in the reach area well. However, the centre does not provide enough opportunities for adults to develop their employability skills. Overall learning and development opportunities are good.

The centre staff have a clear sense of drive and passion, and a good understanding

of the difficulties they face in the reach they serve. Partnerships with the local community and other agencies are effective. Regular partnership meetings are arranged, which ensure services are well integrated to deliver cohesive provision for users that impacts positively on their lives.

The advisory board provides effective supervision and support for leaders and managers to improve provision. Generally, accurate self-evaluation identifies the key priorities for improvement. The number of users accessing the centre's good-quality provision has consistently increased. Nevertheless, targeted outreach work is not developed sufficiently to engage more effectively with lone parents.

Managers and staff form a committed team that is determined to improve provision and extend services to the wider community. They are focused on improving areas of weakness and gaps in provision and outcomes. The strong teamwork of staff and high levels of commitment by all stakeholders contribute effectively to improved outcomes for users. The local authority and advisory board support developments well and have good systems to monitor outcomes. The centre's capacity to sustain improvement is good overall.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the centre's outreach work to engage more effectively with hard-to-reach lone parents, to encourage them to use the centre's services.
- Provide further opportunities for adults to develop their employability skills by extending services to help them return to work.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Health outcomes for families are good. Data supplied by the centre show that increasing numbers of mothers, including those from targeted groups, are continuing to breastfeed and rates are above average. Obesity rates are lower than average for the area. The weekly playgroup sessions, for children and their parents encourage physical activity at the centre and home. As a parent commented, 'Great play activities that give my child plenty of exercise.' Parents and carers are increasingly confident about managing fussy eating and choosing the right food for their children. Families benefit from effective integrated services to promote their well-being, such as those vulnerable families referred for early intervention.

Early Years Foundation Stage data from local schools in the reach area indicate that children make good progress from their starting points in developing the skills that will help them in the future. The centre has taken effective action to reduce the achievement gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the rest. Playroom facilities are varied and children enjoy their time using the many good resources available at the centre. Activities offered by the centre are popular. A parent attending the 'Stay and Play' sessions said, 'It has helped my son to know and accept the concepts of sharing and caring for babies and young ones.'

Families using the centre make good progress in developing their skills, including parental skills, and demonstrate improvement in their educational and personal development.

Staff supervise children effectively throughout the day. They ensure that parents develop good observational skills in supervising their children. One parent said, 'I am now a better role model to my child. I stick to routines and practice safety more, giving clear instructions.' Regular meetings and effective communication between centre staff and partner agencies mean that some families who may be at risk of harm and children assessed under the Common Assessment Framework are closely monitored and kept safe. Case studies show positive impact and improved well-being and welfare for children subject to child protection plans and looked after children.

Families in workless households are very appreciative of the financial advice guidance provided by the centre. Information on Child and Working Tax Credits, as well as help provided to the growing housing needs of families, is effective in improving their economic well-being. Increasing numbers of parents and carers whose first language is not English have completed the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) course and progressing on to other training. A parent who successfully completed the course said, 'I am now able to communicate with other mothers at the centre and help my child improve his language skills.' Adults engaged in the Next Steps work-focused employment initiative acquire an appropriate range of job preparation skills.

The centre has established its role in the community. The 'Get Walking Keep Walking' weekly walks in Streatham Common provides families with good opportunities to meet other families in the community. Children's behaviour is good and they form positive relationships with each other. They are able to influence the environment in which they play because sessions offer good levels of child-led play. Parent representatives are increasing their influence and shaping services offered by the centre. For example, they have been consulted about the development of the new children's centre site. A number of parents have progressed into volunteer work as a result of initiatives carried out by the centre.

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	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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2

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	2
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How good is the provision?

2

The centre works effectively with other agencies to ensure assessments, such as those carried out for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are robust and well informed. The use of the Common Assessment Framework is well established and effective in highlighting users that are at risk and in need of support. Families gain access to a range of focused services through these services. A parent who attended the parenting programme, which included behaviour management techniques, said, 'I gained more knowledge and confidence on how to deal with my child's behaviour.' The variety of services and activities, including the 'Drop-in Playgroup', provide fun and learning opportunities. The 'Listen, Laugh and Sing' sessions are popular. One parent commented: 'My child chid loves it. She is more interested in reading books and she sings a lot at home.'

The centre engages effectively with fathers. The weekly 'Dad's Group' sessions are attended regularly by fathers. However, services do not provide enough opportunities for adults to improve their employability skills.

Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage at the centre is good. Children are provided with a good range of activities and learning opportunities from birth that supports their development effectively. Staff make good use of assessments of children's achievements to plan the next steps in learning. High-quality resources that are age-appropriate and interesting encourage children's engagement. The centre promotes purposeful learning well. For example, a parent attending one of the cooking courses said: 'I learnt about and tried wild rice. The interaction with my child while preparing the ingredients was relaxing and friendly.' The centre is good at recognising users' personal development and achievements through celebrations of work produced by children and families.

Adults were very keen to speak about the high-quality care and support that they receive from the centre. The centre effectively prioritises access to services for targeted groups such as those at risk of social exclusion and families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. It has been highly effective in supporting 10 families to get legal help with their citizenship applications or leave to remain, which has resulted in greater stability and access to financial support. The centre has been particularly successful at supporting more than 20 families to understand their rights to housing as a result of homelessness and/or definitions of overcrowding and liabilities for maintenance of private accommodation. Support is offered in an enabling manner so that families do not become dependent. Regular contact and careful follow-up is very well maintained to ensure that actions identified are carried out when support is transferred to other agencies or families move out of the centre's catchment area.

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	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre works well with a wide range of services to provide good-quality services that have a positive impact on users. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear. The advisory board and local authority provide effective supervision of the centre's activities. Relationships between most statutory partners are increasingly clear and understood, and are being more effectively managed. There are effective performance monitoring systems in place to assure the work of the centre staff and partners. Morale is high and belief in the centre's success is evident at all levels. Leaders ensure a variety of users and service providers make good use of the facilities. Due to high demand for activities, the centre prioritises families in targeted groups such as children with special educational needs and/or disabilities with guaranteed places. Self-evaluation accurately identifies the centre's strengths and weaknesses. There is a good-quality development plan with clear improvement targets identified. Evaluation has resulted in changes to the provision that effectively meets the needs of families.

Good safeguarding arrangements are in place and there is a secure system to maintain and update them. The centre's staff are trained well in safeguarding, and for dealing with domestic violence and for working with children or adults with disabilities. The centre is proactive and collaborates effectively with other key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children. Agencies working in the centre understand the implications of the wider safeguarding agenda. Good vetting procedures help to safeguard children and adults. They ensure that only suitable people work with children and families. Criminal Records Bureau checks are accurately recorded and maintained well.

The centre's actions to promote greater equality for different groups are good in removing barriers, and effective for children and families with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The ethnic breakdown of users is representative of the local area.

Outreach services are effective and targeting the needs of the wider community. They have been successful in engaging targeted groups such as young and teenage parents. The centre's engagement with lone parents is not fully developed to sufficiently involve them in the centre's activities. Resources are well managed so that good quality services are consistently engaging and improving outcomes for

families. It represents good value for money.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
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	2

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

The findings of the Section 5 Crown Lane Primary School inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Crown Lane Children's Centre on 23–24 February 2012. We judged your centre as good overall.

We are very grateful to all the parents, carers and representatives from the centre and the professional partners who took the time to come and tell us about the work they do. You gave us a positive picture of the centre, and what you said was very useful to us in making our final judgments.

Good leadership provided by the centre's management, coordinated teamwork of the centre's staff and its professional relationship with partners are at the core of the centre's work. This means that the workers at the centre communicate well with each other and their feedback provides a good knowledge and understanding of the community's needs.

Those of you who use the centre are now better at staying safe and looking after your families. We know this because many of you told us of what you had learnt. We agree that the centre is very welcoming. The centre is excellent at working closely with other agencies, such as the health service and social services, particularly to help children and families who need extra help and support.

Parents, carers and children benefit from the good provision provided by the centre. Some of you are keen to attend classes to improve your skills. These must be enjoyable because we noticed that there is regular attendance on these courses. Good-quality sessions are organised for you to improve your parenting skills and for your children to develop the basic skills they need for the next stage in their learning. This means that you gain more confidence and expertise, and your children are prepared well to start early education.

We have found a few areas that require improvement and the centre's management are already aware of these. We are recommending that the centre's managers increase opportunities for you to develop your employability skills. We are also asking managers to increase the number of lone parents using the centre's services.

We wish you every success for the future.

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