

Inspection report for St Kilda Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Havering
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with parents and carers, front line staff including family support workers, crèche workers and a range of staff from the local authority and partner agencies, including schools and local health services.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

St Kilda Children's Centre is a phase 2 centre. It fulfils the core purpose. It is based in a large detached house within a short walking distance of Romford town centre.

Governance is the responsibility of the local authority and the Children's Centre Local Advisory Group (CCLAG) supports the work of the centre. A centre manager is based at the centre on a full-time basis with six family support workers, an administrator and midwives. Other staff, including health visitors, family group conferencing workers and group childcare workers all operate from the centre. Recent budget reductions have reduced the range of universal activities on offer and the centre has targeted its resources towards families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable.

The reach area is under review but currently includes parts of Romford Town, Pettits and Squirrel's Heath wards. The reach area has been extended since designation. It covers 19 Super Output Areas (SOAs) of which one is in the top 14% most deprived in England and two are in the top 10% least deprived. Most of the reach area covers SOAs in the top 50% – 80% least deprived. There are 1853 0–4 year olds in the reach area, of which 186 live in the most deprived SOA. The percentage of children living in workless households (3%) is lower than that found nationally. The percentage of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance in 2009 was 5%, slightly higher

than the and England average. The level of child poverty is better than the England average with 20% of children aged under 16 years living in poverty.

Most families (96%) living in the reach area are of White British heritage; however, the population is changing as more Black African and Eastern European families move to the area. Data show that around 22% of school children are from a minority ethnic group. The most recent data from June 2012 shows that the most widely spoken languages include Lithuanian, Polish, Urdu, Chinese, Turkish and Romanian.

Children’s skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are typically in line with 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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Passionate and committed leaders, managers and a wide range of front-line staff have made good progress in improving the lives of children and families in Romford, particularly over the last two years. By working well together they ably deliver good quality provision, particularly for those families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable. A grandmother typifies the views of many families who access the centre: ‘I just walked in one day because I needed some help. It was the best thing that ever happened.’

Through significantly strengthening their partnerships with health visitors and midwives the centre has rapidly increased contact rates so that a large majority (65%) of families are registered with the centre and most access their services. Those families using the centre are very positive about the services they use. As one father said: ‘the children’s centre plays an essential role in the community.’

In July 2012, the local authority reconfigured its children’s centre services and many universal activities ceased. Some parents have been safely recruited and trained to deliver universal groups for families but insurance issues severely restrict opportunities for them to volunteer at present. The centre now has to focus on

delivering more targeted support to families and universal health services, including development checks with community nursery nurses, parenting classes with community midwives and child health clinics delivered by health visitors.

The support and guidance provided to those families whose circumstances make them more vulnerable are very effective and making a discernible difference to their lives. However, the changes to provision have significantly reduced the range of universal activities available and impacted negatively on the number of adults undertaking training or accessing further education.

Families feel very safe. Safeguarding arrangements are exceptional, particularly for the large numbers of families that are subject to domestic violence in the area. Partnerships with social services, including duty and assessment, ensure that children are very effectively safeguarded.

Partnerships are good overall, but less well developed with some local schools. The overall achievement of children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage did not improve in 2012 and the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and their peers increased. Leaders and managers are acutely aware that this is something they need to contribute to improving.

Exceptionally, the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory because leaders and managers do not have all the support they need to drive improvements further. The centre is not provided with data at reach area level so that it can more effectively target its services and it does not always record and track the impact of interventions. Although the advisory group provides effective support for the centre, it does not yet offer high levels of challenge, for example through rigorous reviews and setting challenging targets, in order to drive improvements faster. However, leaders and managers have driven improvements decisively and day-to-day supervision and management are effective and highly regarded by staff.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority and its health partners should:
 - provide data on the full range of key performance indicators at a reach area level, so that leaders and managers can more effectively evaluate and target services further. This should include data on Early Years Foundation Stage achievement, obesity rates of children in the Reception Year and breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks
 - immediately address insurance issues around volunteering so that parents can play an active role in the delivery of universal services.
- Improve evaluation and service planning by:
 - further developing the role of the Children's Centre Local Advisory Group in implementing rigorous annual performance reviews and setting specific, measurable, achievable and ambitious targets to drive further

- improvements in outcomes
- implementing clearly prioritised action plans that are reviewed regularly
- implementing effective tracking of the impact of interventions.
- Contribute more fully to improving the achievement of children and families in the reach area by:
 - strengthening partnerships with schools, early years settings and adult learning providers through the Children’s Centre Local Advisory Group
 - ensuring that children and families have access to high quality opportunities to learn and develop on a more regular basis.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families are very well supported and say that they feel safe. Thresholds for referrals to a range of additional services are clear and family support workers provide effective support to those families who require extra help. Looked after children say that they enjoy supervised contact sessions with their parents, and children who are subject to child protection arrangements are very well supported. In 2011/12, 13 child protection cases were opened in the reach area and nine of these were closed following interventions by the children’s centre. Family group conferences regularly take place at the centre and help to ensure that some children remain with their families and do not enter the care system. Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes are used well and case studies show the impact of high quality assessment and action planning. For example, a single homeless parent was supported to access housing and child benefits, and provided with a grant for baby equipment, furniture and white goods. Cases are closely supervised and associated action plans are time limited. In 2012, the centre instigated 20 CAFs and 20 pre-assessments.

Obesity data are not available at a reach area level. However, borough-wide data show that obesity rates of children in Reception classes are improving, although they remain above the national average. Health visitors and midwives say that breastfeeding initiatives, including the café which is very well attended, are starting to improve breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks, although this impact is not yet clear in the borough-wide data. Families are encouraged to play and exercise, through initiatives like the Olympic day, and encouraged to eat healthily at the centre. Some parents have attended healthy eating courses, although these have now ceased.

The respite crèche provides opportunities for parents to attend adult learning courses, interviews or appointments. However, the refocusing of resources towards more targeted support has reduced the percentage of parents taking part in learning from over 35% in 2011/12 to around 16% in 2012/2013. Nevertheless, some parents have recently received a range of training, including first aid, so that they can make a positive contribution to the centre by delivering universal group sessions. Parents say that their views are taken on board through the parents’ forum or the Children’s

Centre Local Advisory Group. Parenting programmes make a discernible difference to families. As one teenage mother attending 'Mellow Babies' stated, 'The staff are really nice. They don't judge and they get involved with all discussions and activities.'

Children's learning and progress are planned and tracked by respite crèche workers who use 'Development Matters' well. However, the gap between the lowest achieving children and their peers in the local area has widened from 28.7% in 2009/2010 to 31.9% in 2011/2012. The achievement of children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has plateaued at 60% over the last two years and has now fallen behind the national average (64%).

Families receive one-to-one support to improve their economic well-being, for example through the Parents' Surgery and the interventions of family support workers. Case files clearly show improvements for some of the most vulnerable families.

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	1
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	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	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre has made significant progress in engaging all target groups, particularly those families whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable. There are no target groups that are underrepresented and many groups are very well represented, including teenage and young parents. In 2012, 220 fathers engaged in a range of provision including baby weighing and parenting classes. Fathers are overwhelmingly positive about the services they access. As one said, 'The staff at the dads' club are excellent and it gives me the chance to get out and meet other fathers.' The centre has been particularly successful at engaging families from the most deprived Super Output Area. Of the 186 children living in this area the centre has reached 133 of them and 52% of these have accessed services over the last 12 months.

The approach to family support work is very effective at supporting families with complex needs and those whose circumstances may make them more vulnerable. Provision to promote early learning for children and opportunities for adult learning are less well developed and it is therefore more difficult for the centre to provide evidence of its impact on achievement. However, the take-up of two-year-old nursery funding for more vulnerable children is good and improving. In January 2012, 12 children were allocated places at local childcare providers and the centre systematically follows these referrals up after three months. Records of the learning and development of children that have attended the respite crèche are always passed on to other early learning providers and transition is therefore smooth. As one teenage mother said, 'I like coming here. I'm learning lots about my baby. It's so good to meet mums in a similar situation to me.'

The centre provides good quality care, guidance and support around a range of issues including benefits and hospital appointments. Disabled parents are well supported. However, it is not outstanding because the quality of advice provided to families on issues such as training, employment and further education is more limited. Advice on parenting through parenting courses is good. Across the Borough, children's centres deliver three parenting programmes nine times per year, which are well attended by families in the St Kilda reach 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	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Recent changes, including the introduction of the Early Help team, are strengthening outstanding safeguarding arrangements further. Multi-agency working to support families, including those experiencing domestic violence, which has risen by 10% over the previous 12 months, is very well developed and highly effective. All staff are subject to safe recruitment processes, including Criminal Records Bureau checks which are renewed every three years. Day-to-day management and supervision are effective and family support workers receive appropriate case supervision on a monthly basis. The centre manager and team manager have recently completed professional qualifications in leadership, and are realistic about what they need to do to improve provision further.

Consistently good professional supervision and management arrangements have

enabled leaders and managers to drive improvements in provision and outcomes at a rapid pace over the last two years, so that outcomes are now good overall. Recent budget reductions have impacted on the range of services available. However, contact and engagement rates are good. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate but it is not always based on data as the local authority and its partners do not provide this on a reach area basis. The centre evaluates some of its provision well, but this is not always systematic or consistently applied. The Team Manager, who is relatively new in post, effectively oversees the work of the centre on a frequent basis. However, the supportive Children’s Centre Local Advisory Group does not always challenge the centre enough or review its performance rigorously. Development planning is therefore not as detailed as it needs to be to drive further improvements quickly and it is not always made clear enough to all parties what the centre’s priorities are or should be. Capacity for sustained improvement is therefore satisfactory.

Referrals for children’s centre services come from a wide range of partners, mainly health services and children’s social care. Referrals are often based around support for families who have been subject to domestic violence (27%) and mental health issues (16%). The number of referrals is rising quickly, from 61 in 2011 to 83 in 2012.

The Children’s Centre Local Area Advisory Group meets regularly and is well attended by many partners and more recently parents. However, the engagement of schools is more limited and this hinders the centre’s ability to contribute more fully to improving the achievement of children. The promotion of equality and diversity is good, with many disabled children and parents attending the centre and all target groups well represented.

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	3
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	1
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

<p>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</p>	<p>2</p>
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Not applicable.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the St Kilda Children’s Centre on 31 January–1 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall.

It was a pleasure to meet you during the inspection. We particularly enjoyed talking to some of you at ‘Mellow Babies’ and appreciate the time that you gave to speak to us on a one-to-one basis.

We concluded that passionate and committed leaders and front-line staff including family support workers, midwives and health visitors are making a positive difference to the lives of children and families in Romford. As one of you told us the centre makes a real difference when you need support: ‘I just walked in one day because I needed some help. It was the best thing that ever happened.’

We concluded that partnerships with health services are now good and that the large majority (65%) of families living in the area are now registered with the centre and most access services. This is a much better situation than two years ago.

We also listened very carefully about the changes to children’s centre services which led to many universal activities ending in the summer of 2012. We know that some of you have been safely recruited and trained to deliver universal groups for families but insurance issues severely restrict opportunities for you to volunteer at present. We have asked the local authority to resolve this immediately so that some of these activities can be reinstated. We have also asked the centre to work more closely with adult education providers so that there are more opportunities for you to engage in employment, training or further education. However, despite the cuts, the most vulnerable families receive very targeted and effective help.

You told us that you feel very safe. Safeguarding arrangements are exceptional, particularly for the large numbers of families that are subject to domestic violence in the area. We judged partnerships to be good overall, but less well developed with some local schools. The overall achievement of children at the end of the Early Years

Foundation Stage has not improved this year and the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and their peers increased. We have therefore asked the centre to look more closely at ways to contribute to helping improve this.

We concluded that the centre's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory rather than good because leaders and managers do not have all the support they need to drive improvements further. Although the leaders and managers have very ably driven improvements, they are not always challenged enough by the Advisory Group. They are also not provided with the data they need to plan more effectively. We have therefore asked the local authority and health services to look at ways of improving this.

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