

Kensington Avenue Children's Centre

Hawthorn Avenue, Thornton Heath, Surrey, CR6 8BW

Inspection date 8–9 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
		Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- A large majority of families are registered with the centre, but the proportion of those who access children's centre services, especially from low income families and those who are lone parents, is relatively low.
- Having identified the key groups that most need their support, the centre has not fully set up procedures to check what specific services would help them best or to monitor the use they make of the services at this and other centres within the local area.
- There are good links in place with Kensington Avenue Primary School, but they are less well established with other schools, early years settings and health visitor services in the local area. Consequently, systems to check on the impact the centre has had on children being ready for school are patchy, especially in relation to those who need most support. Parents are not always clear about the purpose of some of the sessions and how they can best support their children.
- The local authority has improved the quality of information provided to the centre. However, this is not being analysed well enough by leaders, the strategic advisory board or the governing body to challenge the centre. As a result, the centre has not fully identified the impact it is having on its key target groups and why some are not accessing the centre more.

This children's centre has the following strengths:

- The centre has gone through a prolonged period of upheaval and change. Despite this, staff morale has remained high because of the good day-to-day management.
- Families, including the most vulnerable, who receive intensive, wide-ranging support, have benefited well from this and show high levels of trust in staff. Positive comments from parents include, 'I don't know where I would have been without them.'
- The centre provides a good range of courses for adults and has been successful in attracting those who need support the most, helping them to extend their skills, confidence and employability.
- A high number of families attend the open sessions, such as Creativity and Innovation. Parents enjoy the social benefits for them and their children. They feel welcome and appreciate the good quality resources. Parents actively support the centre and are fully involved in decision making.

Information about this inspection

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

This inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the interim strategic manager and the centre operations manager, an officer from the local authority, representatives from the local health services and other key partners including those from adult learning and voluntary organisations. They held discussions with parents and members of the strategic advisory board and the governing body. Several activities were observed by the inspectors, including two jointly with the centre operations manager who also attended all team meetings along with the interim strategic manager.

Inspectors looked at the centre's self-evaluation, action plan, a sample of case studies, safeguarding policies and procedures and a range of other documentation.

Inspection team

Joan Lindsay	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Ann Janssen	Additional Inspector
Teresa Kiely	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

The centre was designated in November 2007, as a phase two stand-alone centre. In December 2012, following local authority reorganisation, it merged with the phase three Norbury Manor Children's Centre to form the North West Children's Centre Collaboration. The collaboration delivers or supports access to a range of services to meet its core purpose. The centre has an operations manager responsible for the day-to-day management and there is an interim strategic manager in post for the collaboration. The governing body of Kensington Avenue Primary School (URN 134475) manages the centre on behalf of the local authority; the deputy headteacher line manages the collaboration's leadership team. The school is subject to a separate inspection.

All services have been delivered from the Norbury Manor site at Norbury Manor Primary School since March 2013 while building work is taking place at the Kensington Avenue site. This is due for completion in November 2013. The centre is open from 8.30a.m. until 4.30p.m. Monday to Friday all year round, apart from one week in the summer.

There are 1,750 children under five years of age living in the centre's reach area. Children enter early years provision at levels slightly below those expected for their age. The centre serves 15 super output areas (SOAs), with two ranked in the 10% most deprived, six in the 10% to 30% bracket, six in the 30% to 50% and one in the 50% to 80%. Approximately 6% of families are eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, which is very low; 24.5% of children from birth to four years of age are living in out of work benefit claimant households, slightly higher than the national average. The area is very ethnically diverse, with White British heritage families accounting for 24% of the population, compared to a Croydon average of 41%. Asian families make up 20% of the population and families from a Black heritage account for 39% of the population.

The centre has identified its priority groups as lone parents with young children, children from Black and minority ethnic groups and low income families from the most disadvantaged communities.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of families using the centre, particularly from those from low income families and lone parents of young children, by:
 - having effective systems to check their use of this and other children's centres in the borough
 - clarifying the needs of these groups and providing the most appropriate services
 - working closer with health visitors to share information about families so that they can be identified, contacted and encouraged to attend.
- Support children, especially the most vulnerable, to be ready for school and to narrow the achievement gap by:
 - providing consistent levels of support for parents, in particular those from target groups, during sessions that are open to all
 - ensuring parents are fully aware of the purpose and areas of learning in specific groups
 - working with other schools and early years settings to have a consistent way to monitor children when they move on and to measure the impact of the centre.
- Ensure leaders and managers, the strategic advisory board and governing body analyse the data that are now available to identify the groups that need support the most and use this to challenge the centre effectively in relation to those target groups' engagement with the centre and the impact services have on their lives.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Registrations and the number of families who access this or other borough centres are increasing despite the upheaval of the merger and current closure of the main site. 'Family Fun Saturdays' and a loyalty card incentive to come to the centre have added to the numbers overall. Nevertheless some key groups, particularly lone parents and those from low income families, are not accessing services as much as others. The centre has not fully analysed the reasons for this or checked that their specific needs are being met at other local centres.
- The majority of families from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds who are registered access a local children's centre and account for 70% of the new families joining in the last three months.
- Several midwifery clinics are held at the centre each week and this has increased families' access to early childhood services. However, links and information sharing with health visitors are less well established despite the centre's efforts. This has some impact on the centre identifying which families need most support.
- Close ties with adult education providers, a wide range of courses including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), and the provision of crèches have led to good numbers of adults, including those from the most disadvantaged areas, accessing courses to improve their skills.
- The centre has been proactive in establishing links with childcare providers and early years settings in the local area in relation to supporting the large majority of eligible two-year-olds to take up their entitlement to free early education. Most children, including those from target groups aged three and four, take up early education places locally.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The centre has only recently identified the key groups that need support most and so the range and relevance of those services in meeting their needs require improvement. Whilst the quality of the activities is generally good, there is some inconsistency in how well those running the sessions make parents aware of how best to support and engage their children and what the aim of the session is.
- Parents enjoy the social benefits that the centre provides for them and their children. They are pleased with the range of activities and the quality of the resources and they report that their children become more independent. However, the information used to support this view is largely anecdotal as the centre has only recently started to monitor the progress of a small group of children who have moved to Kensington Avenue School and there are no consistent methods to measure the progress children make when they move elsewhere.
- Early Years Foundation Stage profile results were on an upward trend but have dipped below the borough levels in 2013 and the gap between the lowest 20% and the rest has widened. The centre has made contact with all local early years settings, but the work to specifically support children from the key groups and so narrow the achievement gap is not yet well established.
- Families are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles through sessions such as Love Food, Save Money. However, the centre does not have ready access to health outcomes data, such as local breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks or recent childhood obesity rates, to help them set specific targets and measure their impact.
- The centre provides or facilitates a good variety and quality of services to develop adults' skills across a range of areas such as courses for home safety and managing children's behaviour, and courses to improve adults' language and literacy skills. A large majority of parents from disadvantaged areas access courses at local children's centres and several have progressed to higher levels of education as a result. The employability drop-in sessions and advice for job seekers have had some notable successes. Parent volunteers make a significant contribution to the centre, especially as literacy champions.
- Case files and needs assessments are kept to a high standard and show that families with wide-ranging, and often very pressing, needs receive swift, well-coordinated support. This has been recently enhanced by the implementation of the Family Engagement Partnership (FEP) bringing

different agencies together.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The merger of two centres and the temporary closure of the Kensington Avenue site have presented challenges for those who lead and manage the centre as well as for the recently constituted strategic advisory board and the governing body. Staff have coped with the changing responsibilities and locations well because of the good day-to-day management. The advisory board and the governing body have been supportive throughout the process. However, they are not sufficiently aware of the target groups the centre sees as needing most support and so are not challenging the centre effectively enough or evaluating the impact of its work on those priority groups.
- The centre's action plan is succinct and regularly reviewed. However, other ways to self-evaluate, analyse data about key groups in the local area and to monitor services are not sufficiently directed at measuring the impact the centre has on its identified priority groups and how they can be helped best.
- There are good systems of supervision and support for staff and a clear recognition of where additional training is required as a result of the changing roles and responsibilities.
- Staff are very aware that safeguarding vulnerable children and adults is a priority; good levels of training and very comprehensive policies and procedures reflect this. The FEP system of establishing which organisation is best placed to support vulnerable families means that partners work closely together.
- Children's centre input, particularly that provided by the family support workers, has made a significant contribution to improving the lives of the most vulnerable families, including those children who are subject to child protection plans or those experiencing domestic abuse. Common Assessment Framework processes are used well to ensure families receive coordinated early help.
- Resources are good and the outside area is particularly attractive and well used. Specific sessions, such as the weekly outdoor play, are popular with parents. However, there are missed opportunities to ensure that parents who do not have English as their first language are engaging effectively with their children. There is limited information available in other languages and, as a result, some parents do not always fully understand the centre's policies, such as on mobile phone usage.
- Parents have high levels of satisfaction with the centre and especially the welcoming, helpful staff. They make their views known through the parents' forum where all key groups are represented. They feel listened to and that they have a role in shaping services. Methods to obtain children's views are less well established.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Unique reference number	21649
Local authority	London Borough of Croydon
Inspection number	428579
Managed by	The governing body of Kensington Avenue Primary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1750
Interim strategic manager	Paula Hassall
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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