

Inspection report for Cambridge Children's Centre

Local authority	Sefton
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Cambridge Nursery School URN104847
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Cambridge Children's Centre EY339800

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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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers, centre staff, parents and a number of partners including health, education and children's social care professionals. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Cambridge Children's Centre is a phase one, purpose-built centre and is on a site shared with Cambridge Nursery School. The centre comprises of a maintained nursery school, childcare provision and community services. The linked provisions are subject to separate inspection arrangements. The nursery school was last inspected in December 2012 and the childcare was last inspected in January 2010. The reports of these inspections are available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. The centre was designated in December 2008 and provides the full core purpose. The range of services includes health services, integrated childcare, early education services, crèches supporting early education, parenting programmes, family support and outreach services and adult education. Services are provided at the centre as well as from Bedford Road Community Centre, Bedford Primary School and Christ Church Primary School.

The centre is located in the Derby ward of Sefton and is in the 10% most disadvantaged wards in the country. It lies within half a mile of Liverpool and is close to the city centre. The reach population of the centre includes 844 children aged from birth to four years, with 69% of these children living in the top 10% of most deprived wards in the country. Data show that 43% of the children in the area live in households where no-one is working. The Derby ward is a mixture of private and social rental, and the area is undergoing a massive housing regeneration. Within the reach, there are high levels of financial hardship, lone parents and unemployment. Children's levels of skill on entry to early years provision are

well below those expected for their age. The large majority of local families are of White British heritage with smaller, but growing numbers of other ethnic groups.

The centre is managed by the governing body of Cambridge Nursery School on behalf of the local authority. The centre shares an advisory board with Seaforth and All Saints Children's Centre that includes representatives from the local authority, local community, centre staff and parents.

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

One of the most significant features of Cambridge Children's Centre is the overwhelming feeling of a close-knit community. Parents consider staff as friends because they are so welcoming and go the extra mile to ensure the needs of families are met. 'If staff weren't so friendly and approachable, I would not have come here' is a typical comment expressed by parents. Other comments describe the centre as a second home and parents state: 'Staff are really supportive. There isn't anyone you feel you can't talk to. They will help you out and signpost you to different services.' The centre effectively promotes good outcomes for families and the promotion of children's safety is outstanding. Leadership from managers and staff working within the centre shows high levels of commitment to the centre's work and morale is high. Partnership working with a wide range of professionals is strong, which ensures a cohesive and well-integrated service. Assessment of the needs of those who use the centre and support for those who are in crisis is extremely effective. As a result, the wide range of services and activities provided are well matched to individual needs.

The care, guidance and support and safeguarding of families is outstanding. Highly vigilant and well-trained staff closely monitor the behaviour and attendance of families with circumstances that make them vulnerable, in groups and on home visits. This is highly effective in identifying particular needs early on and greatly reduces the risk of families reaching crisis point. Expert parenting programmes and safety home checks by family development workers, are improving parenting skills and having an outstanding impact on children's safety. For example, parents are made aware of the dangers in the home in order

to protect children, such as running cold water in a bath first. Equality and diversity is celebrated well. With the formation of an international group of families, parents are able to form close friendships and feel part of the community.

The majority of groups who are identified as in most need are accessing the centre. However, the number of lone parents participating, and therefore benefiting from centre services, is low compared to other groups and the centre is working to improve this. Parents and children really enjoy their learning. This is celebrated well by publicising their achievements in the local media and through presentations of certificates in front of the mayor. Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage in relation to their starting points, and effective links are forged between childcare staff and teachers from the local primary school. Good opportunities are available for parents to play and learn with their children in sessions, such as 'Sunbeams'. A wide range of courses and activities for adult learners are offered; many adults go on to further training and some move on to get further qualifications. Children and families have a good understanding of how to stay healthy because of the wide range of activities and services offered. The centre is committed to reducing further obesity rates in the area. However, data show obesity levels are continuing to rise and are above the national average.

The centre's self-evaluation is good and gives those in charge a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision, enabling them to secure continuous improvement. Plans for the future are realistic and thorough to bring about further improvement to outcomes and provision. Self-evaluation includes the views of staff, centre users, parents, children and partners and so effectively reflects the opinions of everyone involved in order to shape provision. As a result, the centre demonstrates a good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop further ways to engage with more children and parents from the reach area in order to reduce obesity levels, by promoting health and increasing participation rates in health-related activities and services.
- Increase participation rates and improve outcomes for more children and families from target groups, such as lone parents.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families have a wide range of services available to promote their awareness of healthy lifestyles. Attendance at the centre, health services and through outreach has risen from 217 in 2010/11 to 340 in 2011/12. From the 'Be Healthy' questionnaire, 100% of all families are registered with doctors and 94% with the dentist, with 83% having appointments every six months. Centre staff and health partners are working hard to increase breastfeeding initiation rates and as a result, these have increased by 21% in recent years. This is due to the committed and tireless work from health professionals and the implementation of

targeted support. For example, with the excellent support from a breastfeeding volunteer in the centre, mothers are able to seek advice. The centre is making some inroads in improving breastfeeding rates at six-to-eight weeks, although staff recognise more work is needed, and data show a steadily improving picture. Very popular activities, such as swimming sessions and adult fitness classes, are improving the lives of families. For instance, they say that they feel more energised and have lost weight. The nursery school and children's centre has achieved a 'healthy school' award and has an excellent food hygiene rating. Although other incentives, such as the healthy lunchbox campaign, help to reduce the risk of obesity in children in Reception Year, evidence shows that obesity is increasing year-on-year and currently stands at 23% compared to the national average of 9.5%.

Parents, children and staff feel exceptionally secure and safe in the centre. Stringent safeguarding policies and procedures are firmly embedded in the centre. Children and adults demonstrate excellent behaviour and are supported by highly professional and well-trained staff who are very positive role models. Staff demonstrate an excellent understanding of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and excellent early intervention methods mean that the number of children on the child protection register are low. Parents of children who are subject to this assessment, looked after children and those subject to a child protection plan are closely monitored and tracked so appropriate support can be put in place. Parents benefit from specific programmes for promoting parenting skills and demonstrate an excellent understanding of how to keep their children safe.

The centre has been very successful at narrowing the achievement gap of different groups. Parents really enjoy engaging in play with their children and are supported by experienced staff who discuss the purpose behind play activities. With a strong focus on raising attainment, particularly in communication and language skills, carefully planned activities are organised to engage parents in play to develop children's listening and speaking skills. Children achieving at least 78 points, with at least six points in communication and language and personal, social and emotional development have increased by 17% in the last two years, from 38% to 53%. In addition, the percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile has reduced by 14.5% over the last three years and by 4.8% over last year. These improvements are helping to support children's future educational and personal success through the development of key skills. Strong partnership working with local colleges enables parents to access a wide range of courses with a view to gaining further qualifications. Eight parents completing the teaching assistant's course represent a good example of completion rates in adult learning. Volunteering is promoted well in the centre and in the local community. For example, fathers have shared their catering skills and supported parents in cooking healthy recipes from scratch. Good links are well established with 'Sefton at Work' and Jobcentre Plus also supports parents who want to return to work. This effectively reduces the risk of families relying on benefits.

The results from the parental satisfaction survey in 2012 show that 96% of respondents were very satisfied with the services provided by the centre. During the inspection, parents were very complimentary about the excellent care, guidance and support and the concerted

effort and lengths all staff go to in order to ensure families are happy. Strong emphasis is put on obtaining views from parents and effective systems, such as evaluation forms, whisper boards and comment sheets give the centre a good insight about what they want. Parents attend parents' forum meetings and are also represented on the advisory board, which means that governance of the centre is strong.

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	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

How good is the provision?

2

The centre knows families well and together with partners and outreach services, meets the needs of the majority of families with circumstances that make them vulnerable. Effective monitoring and assessing of individual needs of families take place to ensure targeted support. Information from a wide range of sources, such as local authority data, home visits and local intelligence provides staff with a good knowledge of the needs of target groups in the reach area. The centre is effectively addressing the issue of more engagement with fathers and participation rates are increasing. However, engagement with lone parents is low and the centre is looking at ways to increase participation rates so that more benefit from centre services.

Provision to help children to learn and develop is good because personal development and achievement are celebrated well. Staff encourage families who are using the centre to build on their achievements. For example, one parent who completed a teaching assistant course moved on to get a placement in the nursery and then to be employed by the centre. The achievements of families and children are celebrated in a wide variety of ways, such as through displays and certificates. Strong links are established with local schools. Pre-visits, transition meetings and teacher meetings all ensure that children transfer to school smoothly.

Caring and sensitive staff deliver highly individualised care, guidance and support to families, in particular for the families in most need. These families are exceptionally well supported in times of crisis and expert care is put into decreasing anxiety levels and stress. As a result, families have a much better outlook on life. For example, one parent said, 'I have three children under three years old and I have times when I have been up all night and feeling so tired. I come to the centre and staff are so friendly and tell me to go home and get some rest while they look after the kids.'

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

Leadership is strong and all staff feel well supported and valued. Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and effective links are established between strategic planning and service provision, so that all outcomes and provision are at least good with some outstanding features. Key partners are well represented on the advisory board and reflect the community so services are tailored to meet the needs of families. Staff supervisions are carried out on a regular basis and staff have access to good quality training and professional development. Staff successfully cascade their knowledge and skills to the rest of the staff team so the workforce is strong.

The local authority, governing body and advisory board set ambitious and challenging targets in order to deliver the core purpose. Self-evaluation is accurate and thorough and the development plan sets out clear and ambitious actions aimed at key priority areas. The views from parents, children, staff and professionals are incorporated into the self-evaluation process in order to improve outcomes.

Safeguarding arrangements are extremely robust. Stringent vetting and recruitment checks are carried out. This includes ensuring all staff have an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check and regular updates upon their ongoing suitability. Health and safety checks are rigorous and all staff ensure areas are risk-assessed. Multi-agency working is highly effective in making swift referrals for children with circumstances that make them vulnerable; it includes those subject to a child protection plan and those involved in the Common Assessment Framework. The recording of information and monitoring of these families are outstanding. Charity organisations, such as Sefton Women's and Children's Aid

(SWACA) and Venus, who support domestic abuse victims, are very complimentary about the centre. They say, 'Staff feel confident and very safe working in the children's centre.'

Partnerships are strong across the centre and in the wider community. The centre is very proactive in building links with partners in order to deliver a very cohesive service. The centre provides good quality resources and is very creative in its thinking about sustainability. For example, resources are effectively shared across children's centres and groups are carefully organised to avoid duplication. The centre offers good value for money.

Equality and diversity are well promoted and the centre places great emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual. Although situated in an area which is predominantly White British, the centre ensures all families from all backgrounds are made welcome. Disabled children and those with special educational needs are warmly welcomed into the centre. There is a strong culture of respect within the centre and inclusion is well promoted.

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 secures 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	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
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 most recent inspection reports for Cambridge Nursery School and Cambridge Children's Centre childcare provision were considered during the inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Cambridge Children's Centre on 26–27 February 2013. We judged the centre as good overall with some aspects that are outstanding.

It was a pleasure getting to know you and hear your views about Cambridge Children's Centre. Clearly, you all feel very safe at the centre because staff are very caring and go out of their way to meet your needs. You give personal and moving accounts of how staff have changed your lives for the better, such as helping you gain qualifications, increase your confidence and improve your parenting skills. This is pleasing to hear and the inspectors agree with your comments.

The centre knows what the community needs and makes a good effort to get to know you all and bring you to this welcoming facility. However, some groups, such as lone parents, are not engaging with the centre as much as other groups. Staff are aware of this and are looking at ways to draw more families into the centre from all groups. Many of you expressed your delight in healthy activities, such as exercise and football classes, and you said that you are experiencing the benefits of these activities. Many of you said that you are feeling more energetic, have learnt how to cook fresh food from scratch, and are beginning to lose weight. However, levels of obesity in Reception Year children are high and increasing. We have asked the centre to look at how it could help more families to tackle this issue.

We were very impressed with the excellent care, guidance and support offered to families. This is expertly addressed by dedicated and caring staff who want to engage with families and meet their needs. Comprehensive home visits, good partnership working and excellent early intervention methods ensure all families are protected as well as they can be before they reach crisis point.

The leadership and management of the centre are good. The centre is realistic in meeting targets and has a clear vision for the future which is shared with all partners and users of the centre.

You clearly value your centre and we can see why. Cambridge Children's Centre is family-centred, nurturing and a very happy place to be!

We would like to thank everyone who spoke to us. We are very grateful for your help and wish you every success in the future.

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