

Inspection report for 1A Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Camden
Inspection number	367724
Inspection dates	12–13 September 2012
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	1A Children's Centre EY 351434

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.

Report published: September 2012



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361

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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 the centre head and locality manager, staff, representatives from the local authority, and the advisory board. They also spoke to partner agencies, for example health services and social care professionals, parents and other users of the centre.

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

Information about the centre

This phase one centre was designated in June 2007 and fulfils the full core purpose of services. The borough organises its 15 children's centres into five localities and the 1A Centre is part of the Kings Cross and Holborn locality along with Thomas Coram and Coram's Fields centres. It is managed directly by the local authority and there is a joint advisory board for centres in the locality. Leadership arrangements are overseen jointly by a children's centre head who manages the integrated care and early years education element and a children's centre locality manager responsible for ensuring delivery of all other locality services either directly or through partnerships or commissioning arrangements.

Services are available 48 weeks of the year from 8.00am until 6.00pm Monday to Friday and on occasional Saturdays from its own premises and other locality centres as well as additional venues such as libraries. There is an early years education setting on site which was not part of this inspection, having been inspected previously in October 2009.

The locality's reach area covers three wards, Kings Cross, Holborn and Covent Garden, and Bloomsbury. All three wards are very ethnically diverse. The largest

ethnic groups are from the Bangladeshi, Somali, and White British communities but many other smaller ethnic groups live in the area too. The wards also encompass areas of very high deprivation within the Holborn and Covent Garden ward where the 1A Centre is located. For example, 32% of children aged 0 to 4 live in households dependent on workless benefits and 15% of families in the borough are claiming the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Poor quality housing and overcrowding are also common features of the area.

There are approximately 1265 children under five in the locality but the population is very transient with an above average number of families being temporarily resident partly due to the high number of students living locally. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years provision are typically in line with the levels 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

2

Main findings

1A Children's Centre provides a good service for families through working effectively as part of the Kings Cross and Holborn locality. Families are extremely appreciative of the centre, and feel very safe there. For many, the outstanding levels of care, guidance and support they receive have been life-changing and they describe the staff as 'angels' and 'miracle workers'. 'Our lives have changed by 1000%' sums up the views of many families. Key to this support are the excellent safeguarding procedures and the very well-integrated and wide-ranging partnerships that exist with health professionals, voluntary and commissioned services.

Despite a very transient population, the centre has been effective in encouraging families from all target groups, as well as those identified as most vulnerable, to access services. This is because different agencies such as health professionals and housing officers register families all of whom are then contacted directly by centre staff. A clear understanding of the community's needs coupled with very good organisation of staff across the locality means that outcomes are all at least good for

all target groups.

Families are highly satisfied with centre services and make a good contribution to its work. For example, the breastfeeding drop-ins are reliant on trained volunteers. However, there is not yet a structured programme for those who would like to support the centre more generally.

The provision to help children and adults learn and develop is good and there are many examples of where families' lives have been improved. However, there are no consistent systems to follow up the centre's work in the longer term such as when children move on to school or to follow up adults who have attended training, to enable the centre to 'fine tune' its services even more.

The capacity for sustained improvement is good as leadership and management are strong at all levels. In addition, there is a very clear understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development based on accurate self-evaluation and much has been accomplished in improving outcomes for families, especially the most vulnerable. Partners are fully onboard with the centre's aims and staff have a very accurate understanding of families' needs in the area and are committed to continue to improve outcomes for them.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Build on the good training in place for breastfeeding supporters to extend the opportunities for more families to volunteer in the centre.
- Identify precisely where to target further services and measure the longer-term impact of the centre's work by:
 - working with the local authority and locality schools to develop a system to track the achievement of children when they move on to the next stage in their education
 - developing a consistent method to track the progress made by adults who have used the centre when they access training or further education.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families have a good awareness of how to lead healthy lives and a large majority engage well with health services. There is a strong focus on encouraging physical activity and making use of the locality's parks, such as holding a well-attended Olympic-themed health day. Childhood obesity levels have reached a plateau at just above national levels and a wide-ranging healthy eating initiative across the locality has been developed to improve this. Baby clinics and breastfeeding drop-ins held in the centre are very effective in improving sustained breastfeeding rates which are well above the London average. Joint work with health professionals to increase immunisation rates is proving successful. Smoking during pregnancy and teenage

conception rates are both low compared to London and national figures. The centre responds swiftly to local health concerns such as high levels of children's tooth decay and increasing mental health problems with positive outcomes for families.

Families have extremely high levels of confidence and trust in staff. 'The staff have been a fantastic listening ear' is a commonly held view. Their individual and often complex needs and concerns are swiftly identified and supported through the use of the common assessment framework (CAF), including a 'parent friendly' version, and highly effective partnership work. Structured parenting programmes and very supportive work with those suffering from domestic violence do much to improve families' understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe. Consequently, there have been significantly improved outcomes for most children who are subject to child protection plans and/or lower levels of supervision.

Drop-in sessions have a strong focus on early development and the seamless links with the locality children's centres' early years settings mean there is a wealth of expertise to draw on. Any potential concerns are identified early and specialist support, such as from speech and language therapists or referral to the Amazing Tots drop-in for disabled children and those with special educational needs, means that children, including the most vulnerable, make good progress. However, at present the centre has no means to follow up the longer-term achievements of children when they move on to school. Overall, however, the Early Years Foundation Stage results for the locality have improved significantly over the last three years to be largely in line with national figures. The achievement gap has narrowed considerably from being well above to slightly below the national outcome from 2008 to 2011.

The centre works effectively to help develop adults' skills and especially their self-confidence and personal development. Consequently, over a third is engaged in increasing their skills through, for example, English language or parenting classes. Many examples were provided to show where adults have gained employment or their circumstances have been changed beyond recognition due to their contact with the centre; £91,000 in benefits' entitlement was achieved last year for families referred for welfare rights advice. However, the centre does not yet follow up the longer-term benefits of the work it does to support skills' progression and employability once it has laid down the initial good foundations.

Parents are well represented on the advisory board and the joint chairs are fathers who have close links with the centre. Families from all target groups feel they have a voice in relation to what services are on offer through regular evaluations and feedback to the parents' forum.

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
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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

Strong links with other agencies ensure that most of the children under five in the locality are registered with the centre and all target groups are well represented. The centre has been particularly successful in engaging with the Bengali community through specific drop-in and parenting sessions. The Young Parents' Project ensures the needs of this particular group are met well. Accurate assessment of specific needs especially for the most vulnerable groups such as families in overcrowded or unsuitable housing and the way services are adapted to meet those needs ensure that participation rates are high.

The use of libraries, art galleries and community facilities such as Dragon Hall, with some Saturday and evening events, ensures everyone has plentiful opportunities to widen their experiences. This has a positive impact on the enjoyment and achievement of families across all target groups. Achievement is celebrated well with certificates awarded at the end of courses and also in recognition of individuals' support of the centre. This is much appreciated by proud recipients and a great boost to their self-esteem.

Outstanding care, guidance and support especially in times of crisis result from the excellent systems that are in place to identify need and then swiftly galvanise appropriate help. Families spoke of their amazement at the wealth of help they receive and the tenacious attitude of the family support workers who advocate on their behalf, for example, for improved housing or benefits advice or to safeguard children. Weekly multi-agency allocation meetings ensure that bespoke packages of care are very effective with many families reporting life-changing outcomes. 'This centre has been a lifeline...I am so appreciative of everything they have done for me' represents how many of those spoken to view the centre.

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 locality manager and the centre head work very effectively together to ensure the smooth day-to-day management of the centre. Regular meetings at various levels within the local authority and with the other locality centres ensure that services provided best meet the needs of all the target groups and that monitoring is robust. The centre and locality development plans are based on accurate self-evaluation and key targets are accurately highlighted. However, the measures of success are not always specific enough in relation to timescale or in the use of data to help assess impact.

The needs of the high numbers of families using services across the locality are met well because of the efficient use of resources including staff. Careful planning and regular reviews by service providers, including those commissioned by the local authority, mean that there is very little duplication of provision. The attractive and welcoming centre is used well with the benefit of a health suite encouraging even greater usage. Consequently, the centre gives good value for money.

Everyone at the centre is treated with high levels of respect and many families highlight the inclusive nature and how well those from all walks of life mix. Targeted drop-in sessions for childminders, Bangladeshi families and regular Saturday sessions ensure all are included. Staff speak 14 different languages including British Sign Language and this has been highly effective in ensuring families are made to feel welcome and supported. The centre is narrowing the achievement gap between different groups through the excellent levels of support and through increasing the skills and personal development of those who use its services.

Safeguarding procedures are extremely well embedded in all of the centre's work and are greatly enhanced by the excellent partnerships that exist across a very wide range of organisations. Staff are trained to a very high degree and are responsive to local identified need such as an increase in the amount of domestic violence and mental health concerns. The number of CAFs raised and led by the centre has grown substantially over the past year and has led to significantly improved outcomes for families. All appropriate Criminal Records Bureau and vetting and recruitment checks are carried out and the physical and emotional well-being of staff are also relevant key priorities.

Major strengths of the centre's work are the partnerships that have been developed and the way families are engaged with its work. The advisory board provides a forum for parents and partners to come together to work jointly to improve the provision and very good attendance at those meetings shows the commitment of those involved. All families canvassed are fully satisfied with the services on offer with words such as 'fantastic', 'amazing' and 'like a miracle' commonly used to describe how they feel about the centre. Children's views are routinely taken into account too in relation to which activities to offer and this is a major element in the way they enjoy and benefit from their time at centre activities.

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	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	1
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	1

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 1A Children's Centre on 12–13 September 2012. We judged the centre as good overall. There are some outstanding features such as how effectively the excellent safeguarding procedures and partnerships ensure that you receive very high levels of care, guidance and support. This results in you having a great deal of confidence and trust in staff which was clear to see.

During our visit, we looked at your centre and locality development plans and numerous other documents. We spoke to a wide range of partner agencies working with the centre, such as from the health services and social care, as well as staff and members of the advisory board. We also visited many of the centre and locality activities taking place during the inspection, for example various drop-in sessions, the baby clinic and an antenatal class. We also spoke to a substantial number of families using the centre.

Thank you for your participation in the inspection. It was very helpful to hear how very positive you all feel about the centre, especially the commitment and support of the staff and how well you and your children are cared for, safeguarded and supported. Typical comments made to us were: 'Staff are very sincere...it's unbelievable' and 'This centre has been a lifeline....I am so appreciative of everything they have done for me'.

The centre has been very successful in encouraging families from all walks of life to access services at 1A Centre and at other venues in the community. Some special groups such as disabled children and those with special educational needs, young parents or Bangladeshi families are enabled full access to centre services and this ensures that everyone can be fully included in activities and feel safe and secure there.

You have a good understanding about how to lead healthy lives through a focus on healthy eating and taking lots of exercise and because there are very good links with people such as health visitors, midwives and the speech and language therapist. Events such as the locality health day with its Olympic theme are popular and educational.

Children make good progress in their early learning and adults are also supported well to extend their skills such as their knowledge of English. This has helped many of you to return to work or to improve your circumstances such as by getting better housing or more entitlement to benefits. This support has been life-changing for a substantial number of you. However, the centre is not yet following up the longer-term impact of its work, for example how well children do when they move on to school or what happens in the future to adults who have been helped to take the first steps back to employment. We have asked the centre to look at how it can improve this so that it can measure the benefits of the good work it does in the longer term.

Families feel fully involved with the centre and many of you make an important contribution such as by attending advisory board meetings or as breastfeeding peer supporters. Some of you would like to become volunteers and we have asked the centre to look at this. You are all very satisfied with the work of the centre, describing it as 'a huge asset to the community'.

There is a very clear understanding of what the centre's strengths and areas for development are and the staff at all levels are highly committed to continue to improve outcomes for all families in the community. This combined with the outstanding elements that are already evident means that the centre is well placed to continue to improve.

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