

# Midsummer Park Children's Centre

292 Staines Road, Hounslow, TW4 5BA

|                                                            |                         |                             |          |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| <b>Inspection date</b>                                     | 24–25 March 2015        |                             |          |
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>                               | <b>This inspection:</b> | <b>Requires improvement</b> | <b>3</b> |
|                                                            | Previous inspection:    | Not previously inspected    |          |
| Access to services by young children and families          |                         | Requires improvement        | <b>3</b> |
| 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:

- Not enough children and families from priority groups use the centre's services regularly.
- Currently, there are no volunteers and relatively low numbers of adults engage in further education or skills training to enhance their employability and financial health. There is limited exchange of information between partners about the progress made by parents referred to them for support.
- Managers are not using information well enough to keep track of which children and families take up services at the centre or the impact made by the services provided. For example, the centre cannot show how much progress the most vulnerable children make over time.
- The information shared with the centre by social care is incomplete; this inhibits the centre's otherwise good practice in ensuring that children are well protected. The current backlog of early help assessments held by the local authority is delaying the allocation of lower-level case work to family support staff.
- Development planning is very detailed, but does not give sufficient attention to setting timelines, actions and targets that will help centre-specific priorities to be tackled comprehensively and quickly.
- Those responsible for governance are not holding the centre fully to account for its performance.

### It has the following strengths:

- Registrations are rising due to the centre's effective actions and support from health professionals in getting families signed up. The staff are successfully working around the absence of live birth data.
- Family support work makes a positive difference to the lives of those who receive one-to-one help.
- Parents are helped to look after their children's well-being. They know about the importance of a healthy diet, exercise and safe internet use because the centre promotes these aspects well.
- The gap in achievement between Reception-age boys and girls from the poorest backgrounds and others is closing more quickly than seen nationally.
- Families who use the centre hold it in high regard. They particularly appreciate the warm welcome, well-resourced activities, help with parenting skills and good opportunities to make new friends.
- Parents play a full role in the life and development of the centre through the very active parents' forum and as representatives on the advisory board.

**What does the centre need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that at least the large majority of children and families from priority groups engage regularly with the centre by:
  - reviewing the booking system to give priority to children and families who have most needs and who live in the area served by the centre
  - making sure that all contacts are recorded rigorously on E-start
  - developing managers' use of data to help track which children and families are taking up services
  - increasing the number of services taking place in venues other than at the centre to help relieve the high-level demand for places and so that parents have access to more services on their doorstep.
- Improve the outcomes for parents, especially those who are unemployed or on low incomes, by:
  - actively promoting volunteering as a pathway towards employment and getting volunteers firmly signed up to training
  - building firmer links with partners, such as adult learning and Jobcentre Plus, to jointly provide the support that families need and to share information about progress
  - establishing an effective system to track the impact that services are having and use the information to plan future provision.
- Develop systems for tracking the progress made by children when they access centre services. With the local authority and early year's partners, keep abreast of how well children who access centre services get on when they complete the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Work with the local authority, social care and the early assessment team to make sure that information about all the children under five who are subject to child protection plans, in need plans or in care are made known to the centre in a timely fashion. In addition, make sure that families who fall below the social care thresholds and need the centre's support are quickly allocated to family support workers.
- Strengthen leadership, management and governance by devising well-targeted, specific action plans with appropriate timelines and realistic, but challenging, targets to drive forward priority improvements. Report regularly on the progress being made to the local authority and advisory board so that they can look critically at the centre's performance, keep a check on resources and hold the centre fully to account.

**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 senior managers, staff, local authority officers, partners, past volunteers, parents and members of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited activities including Stay and Play, speech and language groups, a family learning session and a child health review clinic. A number of case files were sampled jointly with the coordinator.

Inspectors took into account parents' views as expressed directly to them during the inspection, as well as through their recorded evaluations about the centre's work.

Inspectors also looked at a wide range of documentation.

**Inspection team**

|                                 |                      |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| Christine Field, Lead Inspector | Additional Inspector |
| Jean Cook                       | Additional Inspector |
| Jamie Hassan                    | Additional Inspector |

## Full report

### Information about the centre

The centre opened in 2011 as a stand-alone centre, originally called Hounslow Central but re-named Midsummer Park. Midsummer Park pre-school shares the same building as the children's centre and is subject to separate inspection arrangements. Its inspection report can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>. The children's centre, which is located in the central locality, works very closely with Hounslow Town and Lampton children's centres. The advisory board comprising partners and parents is shared between the three children's centres.

All children's centres in Hounslow are managed by the local authority. The centre coordinator, who directly manages a team of three staff, is responsible for the centre and is line managed by the central area manager. The centre coordinator also manages another children's centre and is play manager at two settings. The local authority's children's centre teacher, who works across 10 children's centres, is an additional resource available to the centre. Family support workers are allocated cases by the three children's centres in the locality. Services provided by Midsummer Park include activities to promote early learning, family support, child and family health, adult learning and volunteering.

There are 1,303 under fives in the reach area. The area is mixed socially, economically and culturally. Nearly half of all families are from Asian backgrounds, one in five is from a White background and the rest are from other ethnicities. The large majority of children and families speak English as an additional language, their home languages being mainly Urdu, Hindi and Polish. All but one of the seven distinct communities served by the centre are amongst the 30% most deprived nationally. Nearly half of the children live in homes where no adult is in paid work. Children's skills and abilities on entry to early education are well below the levels typical for their age.

The main priority groups identified by the centre as most in need of support are families with children under the age of two years living in the 30% most deprived areas and, particularly, those eligible for free early education funding. The centre is also focusing support on reducing childhood obesity.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Access requires improvement because although two-year-olds and children and families from the most deprived areas use centre services they do not comprise the large majority.
- A booking system was introduced last year. Before this, many families had to be turned away due to the popularity of the sessions and limited space available. Families can now phone up and book their place on two sessions a week, but the centre is not giving priority to those with the greatest needs when allocating places, and this requires review.
- The good partnership with health practitioners is supporting the centre's effective work to market what is on offer and get families registered. Registrations are increasing and, at 73% overall, the level is close to being good. The vast majority of under one-year-olds are signed up for services and the large majority used the centre at least once in 2014.
- Centre staff visit health clinics held in the community, as well as those held in the centre, to offer advice to parents-to-be and new parents. They are not routinely logging these contacts on the management information systems. This restricts the usefulness of the data provided to give a fully accurate picture about access rates.
- Information provided at the request of inspectors shows that all two-year-olds eligible for free early education are registered with the centre and that the large majority take up their 15 hours entitlement at mainly good or better quality settings. The tracking of a small group at the co-located pre-school shows that they are on course to meet age-related expectations in their learning, although social skills are weaker than language or physical development. Three- and four-year-olds

tend to have limited contact with the centre as most are full time in nurseries.

- The centre is successful in engaging individual children and families in need of early help support. Case files include extensive information about the contact sustained with these families until their needs are met. Poor housing is one of the major barriers to children's and families' well-being, and the centre works effectively with partners such as Shelter to help to meet this basic need.

### **The quality of practice and services**

Requires improvement

- The range and relevance of services require improvement, because they do not enable the large majority of children and families from priority groups to use them regularly. Sessions such as Stay and Play are in high demand, but children and families coming from outside the centre's area often outnumber those from priority groups. Not enough attention is being given to taking more services into the community so that families have access right on their doorstep.
- There is a wide menu of courses available for adults to extend their education and employment chances, but according to the centre's records only a small number of parents take them up. Where adults have been directed to partners' services, such as the work clubs held at the library, the impact of the services they receive and the progress being made have not been consistently followed up. Currently, there are no volunteers, although 12 parents have expressed an interest in training.
- Children and parents were seen to make good progress in the sessions observed by inspectors. In the toddler speech and language group, children enjoyed working with Mr Moo the glove puppet, who helped them learn new words. Makaton sign language was used by the teacher to reinforce communication and is being picked up by parents to support their children's development. However, information about the progress being made is not being captured or used consistently to inform future sessions.
- Outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage are very close to the national average and reflect positively on the work of the centre and its partners to reduce inequalities. Asian children, in particular, reach a good level of development from a low baseline. However, the centre does not receive information about how well children who have accessed services (such as Let's Get Ready) achieve by the time they are five.
- Collaborative work with a range of partners helps families in most need to overcome some very complex problems often associated with overcrowding, financial hardship and negative relationships. Family support is provided across the locality and the quality is good. The tool used to show the impact of this work is well embedded in the practice of more experienced staff.
- Childhood obesity is a borough-wide issue. The centre has seen local rates drop from 22% to 15% and is working proactively with partners to target a further reduction. Activities such as Cooking with Kids, posters that flag 'I sit when I eat', and the promotion of healthy snacks, form part of the strategy to improve health outcomes.
- Parents are helped to look after their children's well-being by attending sessions on weaning, behaviour management and first aid. They know about the importance of a healthy diet, exercise and safe internet use because the centre promotes these aspects well. Those who use the centre say it is welcoming and friendly. The view of one parent, expressed following a baby group, reflects those of others, 'We leave the centre more relaxed and happy.'

### **The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**

Requires improvement

- There has been a focus on increasing registrations by managers, but less emphasis has been given to securing the regular use of the centre by children and families from priority groups. Quality assurance processes are not probing enough to enable managers to have an accurate view of the centre's overall effectiveness. As a result, self-evaluation is unrealistic and forward planning lacks precision and challenge. Both require improvement to ensure that the centre has full capacity to move forward at a rapid pace.
- The local authority undertakes a detailed annual review of the centre's performance. However,

areas identified for improvement are not followed through well enough during the year, for example in relation to increasing priority families' regular use of centre services or developing ways to improve parents' economic well-being. The area manager gives valuable support to the centre, supervises the coordinator's work regularly and oversees performance management arrangements.

- The advisory board, which assists the governance of all three children's centres situated in the central locality, is well attended by a good range of partners and two parents from Midsummer Park. A new independent chair has just been appointed, who has a firm grasp on local issues and centre priorities, and is committed to moving things forward over the coming months. The board has already identified that training to support its challenge role is required, and this is scheduled to take place shortly.
- Extremely limited resources are being appropriately managed, but are at full stretch. It is recognised that there is potential for more coordinated locality working to enhance capacity. The relatively small budget is being spent according to plan. Staff training needs are appropriately met.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures are effectively implemented. Protecting children is central to the centre's work and staff act swiftly when they have any concerns about a child's or family's welfare. The coordinator's auditing of case file recording is detailed and helps to promote best practice. Parents identify strongly that they feel safe when they visit the centre.
- Children assessed as in need or subject to a child protection plan are not always known about by centre staff, but when they do become aware of such children they work effectively with the various agencies involved to address identified needs. Currently there is a backlog of early help assessments held by the local authority which is a result of staff shortages. This is beyond the control of the centre, but is recognised as delaying the allocation of lower-level case work to family support staff.
- Parents' views are listened to and acted on. For example, an English conversation club has just been set up in response to a request from parents who speak English as an additional language. The parents' forum meets regularly and shares ideas and also receives the minutes of the advisory board to help it keep in touch with strategic matters.

**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. |

**Children's centre details**

|                                                                    |                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>                                     | 21566                         |
| <b>Local authority</b>                                             | Hounslow                      |
| <b>Inspection number</b>                                           | 453956                        |
| <b>Managed by</b>                                                  | The local authority           |
| <b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b> | 1,303                         |
| <b>Centre manager</b>                                              | Gary Conisbee                 |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>                                 | Not previously inspected      |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                                            | 020 8583 5805                 |
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