

Beecroft Garden Children's Centre

Beecroft Road, Brockley, London, SE4 2BS

Inspection dates

29–30 April 2015

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good	2
	Previous inspection:		
Access to services by young children and families		Good	2
The quality of practice and services		Good	2
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a good centre.

- In the relatively short time it has been fully open, the centre has registered almost all of the children under five living locally. Strong links with health services and other proactive partners are having a positive impact on access by families expecting children and with new-borns.
- The centre has used an in-depth knowledge of its local community to identify the families who most need support. Much of its work is linked to providing services to meet those families' needs. Consequently, the large majority of priority children and families, such as those living in the least advantaged areas, make regular use of the centre.
- Parents are well supported in understanding and encouraging their children's early learning. Knowledgeable staff are good role models; children are well prepared when they move on to school. Outcomes at the end of the early years are improving with the percentage of children achieving a good level of development significantly higher than seen nationally.
- Parents who need more intensive assistance receive very effective levels of care, guidance and support from family support workers and the centre's partners. They are given the confidence to get their lives back on track and move ahead.
- Good leadership, governance and management and highly committed staff are ensuring the centre moves forward. Effective support from the local authority and good systems to monitor and gauge the effectiveness of services ensure that the needs of priority families are met well. There is a clear and accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and challenges and a good capacity to continue to improve.

It is not outstanding because:

- Over a quarter of two-year-olds who are eligible for free early education have not yet taken up a place.
- Systems to track the longer-term impact of the centre on children are not fully embedded or consistent across the various schools and early years settings in the local area.
- The specific support for families living in the least advantaged areas and for lone parents to find employment is hampered by the withdrawal of services by Jobcentre Plus.
- The newly formed advisory board, while highly supportive, is not yet holding the centre to account.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of two year olds taking up free early education so that most do so by:
establishing why some families are not taking up the place
working with the local authority to ensure there are sufficient spaces for those who wish to take up the offer.
- Establish robust and consistent systems to track priority children's progress over time by:
continuing to develop the tracking of those children while they are at the centre
working with early years partners and local schools to find out how well children, who have used the centre regularly, achieve at the end of the early years.
- Work with the local authority to ensure that adults receive specialist employment and training advice from Jobcentre Plus to enable more families living in the least advantaged areas and lone parents to return to work.
- Ensure that members of the advisory board are provided with the information and knowledge to challenge the centre effectively, especially in relation to its impact on priority children and families.

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 head of centre, executive headteacher and Chair of the Governing Body of Beecroft Garden Primary School as well as the Chair of the Advisory Board. They met representatives from the local authority and spoke to several partners including those from health, social care, neighbouring schools and other support agencies. The inspectors spoke to several parents and volunteers and took their views into account.

The inspectors visited sessions taking place in the centre such as the 'Walk in the Woods' activity and a 'Stay and Play' session. A joint observation was undertaken with a member of staff.

Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including the centre's self-evaluation and action plan, a sample of case studies and those related to safeguarding practice, policies and procedures. The head of centre and executive headteacher were present at all the inspection team meetings.

Inspection team

Joan Lindsay, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Libby Dickson	Additional Inspector
Graham Saltmarsh	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

Beecroft Garden Children's Centre is a standalone centre that opened fully in September 2013. It is located adjacent to Beecroft Garden Primary School in a purpose-built new annex. The centre provides early years experiences, family support, adult learning and health services through partnership work.

The governing body of Beecroft Garden Primary School manages the centre on behalf of the local authority; the headteacher line manages the head of centre who is also the school business manager. There is an advisory board in place to assist governance. The school is subject to a separate inspection. Its report can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>. The local authority is currently reviewing its children's centre services through consultation with various groups.

There are 1218 children aged under five in the Crofton Park ward of Lewisham, the area served by the centre. A third of the area is considered to be in the top 30% of the least advantaged areas nationally. The proportion of young children living in households where no one is in work is 15%, which is below the national average as well as that of Lewisham which is 24%. A fifth of young children live in low income families in the Crofton Park area which is slightly below the national figure and well below the borough average.

Fewer than half the local young children are from a White British heritage. A fifth are from mixed ethnic backgrounds; the next largest groups are Black African and Black Caribbean. Almost a third of residents were not born in the United Kingdom. English is not the first language in almost 16% of households, which is considerably higher than the figure for England as a whole.

Children generally enter early education at levels below those typical for their age.

The centre has identified priority groups needing most support as: young children from minority ethnic backgrounds; children under five living in the least advantaged households; and young children of lone parents.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Good

- The centre has only been fully open since September 2013 but despite this, the vast majority of young children are registered. This has been achieved through proactive staff and highly effective partnerships, especially with health services. This ensures that families are made aware of the centre at an early stage. Strategies include, antenatal sessions, and families with new babies or who have moved to the area are contacted and registered.
- The large majority of all the centre's priority groups make regular use of what the centre offers because services are of a high standard and tailored to meet their needs. For example, English language classes support families who speak little or no English. Families who feel isolated or without the benefit of outdoor space are encouraged to attend sessions such as 'Walk in the Woods' and 'Stay and Play'. Work with local charities Women Like Us and the Look Ahead mother and baby unit encourage regular participation by lone parents of young children.
- Access to health services is supported through regular health visitor clinics held in the centre. Young children have developmental checks there. There is a high take-up and families can receive vitamin D from qualified staff.
- The centre has effective systems to monitor which families are using the services to ensure the priority groups are coming regularly and to follow-up those who do not. They are well supported by the local authority through the provision of information to track the use of the centre by priority groups.

- Although the centre has the borough's highest take-up of free early education by eligible two-year-olds, there is still over a quarter who are not placed. The centre is now aware of who those families are. It is working to establish why they have not taken up the offer and whether there are enough local places to meet their needs. Most local three- and four-year-olds access their early education entitlement.

The quality of practice and services

Good

- The quality, range and relevance of services are all good. A wide range of strong partnerships have been established in a short period of time; the centre is held in very high regard by all who work with the staff. This was summed up by one partner's comment that the centre had 'reduced many tears'. Specific needs are supported well, such as increasing confidence in parenting skills through structured courses and improving self-esteem through the 'Art of Happiness' sessions.
- Children receive well-planned experiences as staff are highly trained, identify early where children need extra help and are effective in encouraging parents to interact with their children. Parents receive good guidance through cue cards, for example, in 'Stay and Play' so that play activities are also good learning opportunities. Parents and schools say that by encouraging children's independence and supporting parents, the centre is very effective in preparing children to move on to school.
- The percentage of local children who achieve a good level of development at the end of the early years varies between schools but is improving substantially overall. It is always significantly above the national level. The gap between those less likely to achieve and their peers is reducing. However, there are not yet consistent methods to track how well priority children progress when they move on to nursery and subsequently school.
- Children who need additional support in smaller groups have their needs met well through input from partners such as Drumbeat School who provide weekly 'Tom Tom' sessions at the centre. Parents are highly appreciative of such work and the positive impact it has on their children's speech and language and behaviour.
- Health outcomes, including for young children who are very overweight, are all improving. They are significantly better than those seen nationally. However, the results are only available for the borough as a whole rather than the centre's specific area. Nevertheless this shows that at 84% the proportion of mothers who continue to breastfeed their babies at around two months is very high. This is as a consequence of effective work with health and other partners to support new mothers.
- The centre's one-to-one support for children and families frequently leads to outstanding outcomes, through family support workers and key partners working together to resolve often complex situations. Close working relationships with social workers, good information exchange and families' high level of trust in staff help to ensure that children are not only safeguarded but families get their lives back on track. One parent commented that 'I wouldn't cope without this place...they are absolutely fantastic'. This was typical of the views of others.
- Volunteers play a significant role in the centre. For example, the English language courses are run by one of the centre's five active volunteers. Parents feel they play a significant role in developing centre services not least through the work of the parent chair of the advisory board.
- There are some significant examples of where individuals have been helped to improve their families' circumstances through being supported back to work by centre staff or local charities. However, the centre's work to support a greater number of lone parents and families in the least advantaged areas is limited by the withdrawal of Jobcentre Plus' specialist input. This is despite the best efforts of staff to re-establish effective links.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Good

- The centre is well led by the head of centre who effectively combines this role with that of school

business manager. She has the strong backing of partners and a committed staff who share the goal of improving the lives of local children and families.

- The performance management and development of staff contribute to the impact on families through targets and training that are linked specifically to priority children's and families' needs. Staff have remained enthusiastic and committed during a prolonged period of uncertainty while the local authority reviews its children's centre services.
- The local authority provides effective support for the manager via regular monitoring, the provision of useful information about families accessing services and the setting of challenging targets. Leaders and managers have a clear picture of the centre's strengths and areas for development. This gives the centre a good capacity to continue to improve.
- Although the local authority has an agreement at a strategic level with Jobcentre Plus to deliver services at the centre, these sessions have not been taking place. This has limited the centre's ability to provide tailored services to help even more priority families back to work.
- There is a clear delineation between the roles of the governing body and the advisory board, ably steered by the Chair of the Governing Body who is a member of both groups. Governors have an accurate understanding of the centre's work and how effectively it is reducing inequalities for local priority children and families. They are given regular reports of what is happening in the centre such as how many and which families are using the services as well as updates on staffing.
- The advisory board has a wide membership with good representation from partners, and parents, one of whom chairs the board. However, the group has only met twice and so, while supportive, is not yet in possession of the high levels of knowledge required to hold the centre to account as effectively as the governing body is able to do.
- Resources are used efficiently to reduce local inequalities, largely through the effective use of the relatively small staff team, through well-embedded partnerships and the valuable volunteer group. Parents appreciate the high quality resources, both inside and outside, as well as the very warm welcome that everyone receives.
- The safeguarding of children threads through all the centre's work. Policies and procedures such as staff training and strong links with social workers and health professionals ensure the risk of harm is reduced for children subject to child protection plans, who are in need or looked after. Staff and volunteers' recruitment and vetting systems are robust. Families who use the centre have very high levels of satisfaction in the quality of services they receive. Many credit the staff with turning their lives around when the future had appeared bleak, summed up by typical statements such as, 'This centre has made such a difference to us; the staff are amazing'. Parents' views are gathered regularly through parents' forum meeting and after specific groups such as parenting programmes; this ensures parents play a significant role in developing services directly related to their needs.

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

Unique reference number	20455
Local authority	London Borough of Lewisham
Inspection number	455059
Managed by	The governing body of Beecroft Garden Primary School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1218
Head of Centre	Samantha Davies
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0208 692 2762
Email address	childrencentre@beecroftgaren.lewisham.sch.uk

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