

Inspection report for Cass Child and Family Children's Centre

Local authority	Corporation of the City of London
Inspection number	404429
Inspection dates	3–4 October 2012
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Sir John Cass's Foundation Primary School URN: 100000
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Cass Child & Family Centre URN: EY288677 Sir John Cass Playcentre URN: EY220746

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: October 2012



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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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre and staff, parents, health professionals, representatives of the governing body, partner organisations and the local authority. The inspectors held informal talks with children and parents throughout their visit.

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

Information about the centre

Cass Child and Family Children's Centre is the only children's centre in the City of London local authority area. It is located within Sir John Cass's Foundation Primary School. The governing body of the school is accountable to the City of London for the management of the centre. The Children's Executive Board for the City of London, which has representation from parents and independent organisations, acts as an advisory board. The centre was designated in 2007 within phase two of Sure Start and provision covers the core purpose for children's centres. The governing body of the school provides 30 childcare places that are managed as part of the children's centre activities in the school's Early Years Unit. The centre has use of the enclosed outdoor space, a sensory room, two large family learning rooms, the community kitchen of the school and other small rooms for consultation and therapies.

The centre is located in a Grade 2 listed building within London's commercial hub. The centre delivers most services from the main site and signposts to activities in community venues, including Shoe Lane and Barbican libraries and in children's centres and voluntary sector settings in neighbouring boroughs. The head of the centre is supported by five part-time staff including a coordinator and an outreach worker, by centre and school administrators and 12 full- and part-time staff in early years. A number of other staff working at the centre, including the adult tutors,

crèche workers, qualified teachers, educational psychologists, speech therapist and a health visitor, are employed by other agencies.

The population of 8,000 people served by the centre is diverse in almost every respect. The residents are outnumbered 40 to one by workers coming to the city each day. Overall, the area is in the 10% least deprived in the country, although the Portsoken ward adjacent to the centre is among the 20% most deprived. A small minority of families (8%) are eligible for workless benefits. Many families are in low-skilled, low-wage employment. There are about 250 children under five living in the City at any one time, although this is an area of high mobility and the number fluctuates rapidly. The proportion of families living in the area from minority ethnic backgrounds (65%) is high and the groups attending the centre reflect the diversity of the population. Among minority ethnic groups attending the centre, the largest are of White European (19%), Bangladeshi (15%) and Pakistani origin (9%). Most of the latter two groups are second and third generations living in the area. More than 35 languages are spoken among the centre’s families. Children enter early years provision with a very wide range of levels of skills, from well below to well above those 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

Cass Child and Family Children’s Centre makes a good contribution to improving the lives of families in the City. Families and staff are justifiably proud to be part of the outstanding Sir John Cass’s Foundation Primary School. One parent’s comment is typical of the great affection that parents have for the Cass centre: ‘I love the staff and everybody here – they have changed my life and give me hope of the best possible life for my children.’ The setting offers a wonderful, secure and welcoming environment for all families in the community. Although the physical access is good, including for parents and children with disabilities, leaders and managers constantly seek to improve this aspect of working in a historic building.

Excellent safeguarding practice is threaded through every aspect of the centre’s work so that families are safe in the centre and wider community. Robust vetting and

security procedures are in place. Support at differing levels, including parenting courses, ensures that parents develop an excellent understanding of how to keep their families safe. The vigilance of staff ensures that risks to children and their families are identified and acted on through well-established partnership working. In rare cases, help is gained through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process or referral to child protection services. The very small numbers of children in the area means that comparisons with other areas are not possible; but taken on a case by case basis, the support given to families in need of help and protection results in each family sustaining a stronger ability to care for children safely and improving well-being.

The centre's focus on developing children's social and language skills is having measurable impact on narrowing the gap in children's achievements by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Children in the area, including those with special needs and/or disabilities, make good progress from their widely differing starting points. This is more marked for children attending daycare or the Nursery class or the 'Talking Toddlers' programme, where some make outstanding progress because each child's progress is evaluated carefully and learning support is sharply focused. The centre's analysis of children's progress in stay-and-play provision and crèches is limited. From their good experiences of playing and learning in a group, most children are well prepared for starting school. Transfer to Reception class is seamless for children staying on at Sir John Cass's Foundation Primary School. However, the centre gathers little information about children moving on outside the area to evaluate its impact on all children's learning and development.

Support to families' health and well-being is good. Parents develop self-confidence through parenting courses and learn practical cooking skills to help with healthy eating. The great majority of families in the area attend baby clinics and children's health is generally good. The centre gives excellent care, guidance and support across all areas of health, finances and family life. Well-tailored courses help the great majority of parents who are facing the greatest challenges in the area to take steps on routes to qualification and employment, and their success rates are excellent. This includes parents speaking English as an additional language. Adults enjoy participating at the centre and some take up roles in the parents' forum and governing body. Most parents contribute regularly to evaluating services for themselves, although they make little direct contribution to advising on key matters affecting the overall development of the centre.

Leaders and managers of the centre and the City focus well on the clear educational and well-being priorities for the area. Resources are well managed and value for money is good. The common purpose of the centre and partners is to enable success in tackling the gaps in economic well-being, health outcomes and families' achievements. With these arrangements in place, the centre has good capacity to go on improving.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with partner organisations to ensure that all children attending the centre’s activities and crèches achieve the best possible progress in their learning and personal development, and that all are as well prepared for moving on to school as possible by
 - using the expertise of staff and advisory teachers to implement ways of collecting information to evaluate the progress of children known to the centre and give additional learning support if necessary
 - gathering information about the long-term outcomes for all children when they move on from the centre, to help assess the effectiveness of activities and set targets for groups and individual children even more sharply.

- Work with the local authority and partner organisations to ensure that families in the area have more opportunities to influence and increase their direct involvement in advising the centre; and that their voice is represented consistently and strongly over time.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Local data show that children’s health is improving securely. A high proportion of mothers sustain breastfeeding for six weeks or more (over 80%) to get their children off to a good start. Immunisation rates are increasing in the target areas, but are still below the national average. Although speech and language, nutrition and child development services are provided from outside the City, all are accessible for local parents through the centre’s clinic sessions. As one parent inspectors spoke to said, ‘It’s just a normal part of our lives that we come here for health checks and baby weighing. I went to the nutritionist and got a lot of help with weaning my baby and she’s putting on weight normally now.’ Healthy snacks are available and physical activities are integrated into many of the centre’s activities so that families attending learn about keeping fit and healthy.

Parents develop excellent skills to keep their families safe in the centre and wider community. Parents model their interactions on the expertise demonstrated by staff; their confidence, for example, in managing children’s behaviour when leaving onto the busy road is outstanding. Children learn to explore adventurously in the centre’s outdoor space with the consistent guidance of skilled staff. Excellent relationships grow between managers, staff and families of all backgrounds so that parents turn to the centre with confidence when difficulties, like domestic violence, arise. Parents completing structured parenting courses or supported by family workers rapidly gain strategies. Formal child protection and CAF plans end swiftly due to the stronger parenting in place.

Parents and children thoroughly enjoy rhyme time and stay-and-play activities. All children attending benefit from playing in the wonderful outdoor spaces. Partnership between the centre and advisory teachers in the 'Talking Toddlers' community programme has accelerated children's development in communication and language. Parents' self-esteem and confidence grows rapidly during this course as they recognise their roles as educators. Children make good progress in physical development and their social skills in stay-and-play provision although their achievements are not always recorded. Children come into Nursery with an extremely wide range of skill levels and records demonstrate that almost all make good or outstanding progress. Of those whose achievements are known at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the great majority reach levels of development that are in line with expectations for their age or above. Children develop good attitudes and skills for learning and they are well prepared for moving on to school.

The great majority of families have at least one parent working and the centre is doing its utmost to improve economic well-being for all families. Every family learning, basic numeracy and literacy course includes an element of enterprise and families come up with great ideas to turn their skills, such as making clothes and cooking, into earnings. Almost all participants complete basic literacy and numeracy courses. A large majority of parents taking level one English as a second language courses progress rapidly on. Parents treat each other with respect and enjoy making friends with families from diverse backgrounds. Parents give their views in questionnaires and evaluations but too few are involved in advising managers to help shape the future of the centre.

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	1

How good is the provision?

2

A carefully balanced, adaptable programme is tailored to support groups and individual needs. As a result, children become sociable and are keen to learn; parents

become more economically secure and take up services so that family lives are improving well. The location of the centre means fewer than half of those attending, including the daycare and nursery are from the City itself. Individual needs are assessed sensitively when a family registers at the centre and information from partners ensures that additional welfare, education and health needs are fully understood. Outreach work, including door-to-door-knocking, enables the centre to get to know families' needs. Because of the small numbers involved and good information sharing with partners, the addresses of all families in the area are known to the centre and the majority of these families are registered with the centre. Nearly all of those not registered are known to be attending early years or children's centre provision elsewhere. Outreach and admissions policies have rapidly increased the numbers of families registered who live in the areas targeted for support. The centre takes an interest in families not registered with them, although services focus on the needs and interests of the families who do attend and groups are full.

Partnerships, primarily with the Sir John Cass's Foundation Primary School and advisory teachers for daycare and nursery, and Hackney Community College for adult learning, ensure that provision to help families with their learning and development is high quality. With support from the City, advisory teachers' planning in the centre's community stay-and-play provision is good and purposeful, although the tracking and monitoring of children's progress is not yet at the same high quality level as found in daycare and nursery provision. Families are proud to be associated with such well-regarded providers and this has the effect of raising the ambitions of many families attending. These partners ensure that they get to know children and learners who attend well to capture their interests and motivate them. Personal development is celebrated and parents as well as children are encouraged to build on their achievements.

The caring attitudes displayed by staff throughout the centre are exemplary. The quality of care routines and arrangements for children in daycare and community provision exactly matches the needs of children present. Respect and care for families' views is embedded into all the work of the centre and evident for all, particularly for children with special educational needs and parents with disabilities. The range of guidance to families, especially to address financial, benefits and legal matters, and personal counselling empowers and has a sustained impact on families in the target areas that are hardest pressed. Sensitive and confidential services work closely together to support families most in need.

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 governance arrangements work well for partners in the complex internal and external partnerships necessary in this small authority area. Although there is no separate governing body for the children’s centre, leaders and managers focus well on developing the centre and ensure that they have the advice they need. The direct accountability of the centre to the City of London ensures that there are strong bonds between strategic plans, the centre’s plans and the services that are provided. This closely serves the needs identified in the area. Data from the City and partnerships are used well to ensure the centre keeps on track with local needs and changing demographics. Working with partners, the centre has good quality-assurance monitoring in place. Supervision arrangements in the centre build on staff’s existing expertise to improve the centre’s performance through good practice sharing. The centre’s self-assessment is accurate and forms the basis for deciding on priorities. Families contribute continually to evaluation of the centre’s performance, although as the strength of the parents’ forum changes over time, families’ views do not make a sustained and significant contribution to key decisions.

Provision focuses strongly on inclusion in all aspects. Strategies are demonstrably closing attainment gaps for children in the early years and for economically disadvantaged parents who are learning and developing very well through the centre. The centre makes sure that the unique environment is not a barrier to inclusion. Sound financial systems are in place to monitor value for money. Resources are well planned and managed to secure the good and improving outcomes. The development and deployment of staff for outreach is a good example.

Safety and security are paramount. Safe recruitment and staff training are tightly monitored as a basic safeguard and the exemplary practice of staff ensures the safeguarding of all families known to the centre. Strong partnerships run throughout every aspect of the centre’s work and are integral to the high-quality work, for example in early intervention for safeguarding and for children in need. Safeguarding practices in partnership with a very wide range of organisations is exemplary. Staffing arrangements, procedures for referral and the vigilance of all partners ensure that there is a protective network around all families in contact with the centre. High proportions of the groups identified as needing additional support and targeted for involvement use the centre regularly and have their say about services for themselves.

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	2

which secure improvement in outcomes	
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 inspection of Sir John Cass’s Foundation Primary school took place in September 2008 and the school was judged outstanding. A full copy of the report is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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Summary for centre users

Thank you to all of you who spent time telling us about the work of the centre and for welcoming us into your groupwork and classes. We wish you and your children every success in the future. Here is a summary of what we found:

We inspected the Cass Child and Family Children's Centre on 3–4 October 2012. We judged the centre as good overall with outstanding features.

All staff and families are rightly proud to be part of the community at the outstanding Sir John Cass’s Foundation Primary School. All children attending daycare and nursery are well prepared for starting school. We were especially pleased to see how well children move on through to Reception if they are staying on at the school.

Work at the centre to keep you and your children safe in the unique City of London setting is outstanding. The staff and parents work together to keep the centre safe so that children, and parents, can play, learn and explore safely. The centre always

makes sure that any families at risk of harm, or in difficulties like family breakdown, get all the help they need to stop circumstances getting worse.

The centre gives you excellent care, guidance and support for normal family life or in an emergency. Staff are knowledgeable about what help is available for families in the City or nearby. They make sure that you can get to the services you need and give you excellent family support when you need it.

The range of groups, courses and activities suits most of your interests. As a result, increasing numbers of City families attend at least some of the centre's activities. Some stay-and-play groups and facilities like the daycare are very popular with families from outside the City, too.

Children learn and develop well when they come to the centre. By keeping good track of how well children are doing in daycare and nursery, the centre knows that some children here make outstanding progress. This includes children with special educational needs and disabilities and with English as an additional language. Overall, by the time children leave the early years setting, children attending the daycare and nursery develop the skills and knowledge in line with the national expectations for their age even if they started from a low point.

Staff at the centre get to know children who are attending crèches and Stay and Play, and the very popular Rhyme Time sessions, really well. Your children thoroughly enjoy all the group activities. But the centre does not keep as close an eye on how your children are learning and developing in these groups as it could. When you and your children are involved in courses focused on speaking and communicating, like the new 'Talking Toddlers', you help to measure your learning and this helps you to get on as well as possible. We have asked the managers to collect information from all activities and use some their expertise from the daycare, nursery and the expertise of teachers to ensure that you get the best possible learning opportunities all the time.

You enjoy your classes and gain a great deal of confidence in looking after your children. The courses and activities, like the Friday cooking club, help with the practical skills that many parents say they want.

You and your children learn about healthy lifestyles and healthy eating through coming to the centre. This is having a good impact on the health of families in the area.

We were very pleased to see how well the centre knows the hardships that a small minority of the community are facing and is doing something about it. Courses and activities, like the craft classes, include ideas about how to build hobbies into paid work. Courses support you if you do not speak or write English well to begin with, or have difficulty with mathematics. A really high proportion of you coming to the centre go onto these good courses and gain the skills you want. We congratulate the

many of you who complete your course and go on to gain qualifications to help on future routes to work or training.

Some of you give your views in questionnaires and help to evaluate your courses and activities. The centre responds whenever possible by making the changes you want. We have asked the centre to make more opportunities for you to get involved in shaping services at the centre overall.

The Cass centre is a wonderful, safe, secure and welcoming environment for all groups in the community. Activities are accessible to all parents and children, including those with disabilities. Leaders and managers are constantly looking at ways to improve the indoor and outdoor facilities. The number of families served by the centre is growing well in the areas where families most need the services.

Members of the governing body and managers of the centre and the City are forward thinking and they make sure that day-to-day management is as good as possible. With the good partnerships in place with other organisations, the centre has good capacity to go on improving.

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