

Inspection report for Grove House Children's Centre

Local authority	Ealing
Inspection number	367804
Inspection dates	16–17 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Roy Blatchford

Centre governance	School governing body
Centre leader/headteacher	Himisha Patel
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Grove House Nursery
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	None

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.

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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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre, the strategic manager of children's centres for Ealing Council, members of the governing body and advisory board, a range of children's centre partners, health professionals, and front line staff. They met parents and carers, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Grove House Children's Centre is located in an urban area in the Borough of Ealing, north-west London. The locality in which the centre works has a diverse range of ethnic groups, with Asian Indian making up the majority population. Much of the area is economically deprived, with small pockets of affluence. A mix of social and private housing is served by the centre. There are low levels of homelessness, although overcrowding in accommodation is commonplace. Against national criteria, there is moderate child poverty and relatively low levels of unemployment and workless benefits.

The centre provides a range of services including education and play programmes for children, courses and advice for parents and carers, home visiting, and support and community-based health services for a variety of users. The centre works closely with neighbouring children's centres in Ealing, and their services are complementary and planned together. Within the Grove House reach area, there are about 900 targeted children under five years of age. The centre and nursery on the same site operate as one centrally managed and governed unit, with the headteacher responsible for both. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills, knowledge and abilities generally below those expected for their age.

Grove House Children’s Centre is managed by the governing body, accountable to Ealing local authority, and works closely with its own advisory board. It was designated as a phase one children’s centre in September 2003.

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 users and the wider community

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre’s capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

1

Main findings

Grove House Children’s Centre is outstanding and demonstrates excellent capacity for sustained improvement. All safeguarding regulations are met. There is a strong awareness amongst staff and users alike of the need to be constantly vigilant of the safety and well-being of all children and families. The centre strongly promotes equality and diversity through its everyday practices and through a rich array of courses which bring together a diverse cross-section of the local community.

Equally, outreach work from the centre is of a high quality. Staff have a proven track record of engaging many hard-to-reach families and successfully addressing challenging social issues such as domestic violence and the exploitation of families in overcrowded housing. Exemplary practice in building community confidence is demonstrated in the way a few users have become volunteers, and then subsequently joined the staff of the centre, bringing with them diverse language skills to help support outreach work.

The centre's success is rooted in the outstanding leadership and vision of the headteacher, and her experience over many years of creating a centre which combines a nursery school and a children's centre with a powerful common purpose. This was summed up with real clarity by one mother who observed: 'I don't see this as a nursery, it's a family centre which is interested in me and all my children. They're busy, but they always take time to ask how you are.' The headteacher and her deputy have a deep understanding of the needs of the local community and their self-evaluation is excellent. The newly created advisory board is not yet fully engaged in helping shape current and future provision.

Outcomes for users, and the provision which creates those outcomes, are outstanding. Families demonstrate a keen awareness of healthy lifestyles, talking openly about how they have been helped by the centre to eat healthily and ensure their own children avoid obesity, an identified local health problem. Those from vulnerable groups are especially well identified and their needs addressed, for example through the excellent intervention of the Supportive Action for Families in Ealing (SAFE) team.

Children in the reach area feel safe and are well protected; the centre has well-documented evidence of families where staff's intervention in matters such as domestic violence has been decisive. In the words of one mother, 'This was the one place where I knew I would be believed. My child and I were referred on to a safe place, and that has made such a difference to us.'

Children's progress in language development in this linguistically diverse community has been a proper focus for the nursery and children's centre, and through such programmes as Talk Time and Stay and Play, parents report strong educational gains. Similarly, parents comment freely on how the centre's work has assisted them in managing their children's behaviour. One father said, 'There are lots of stresses in life but I want my child to have loving memories, not me shouting.' Family Links parenting courses have received very positive feedback from parents, for example one commenting in a written evaluation, 'Everyone should do this course. Children are our future.'

Through on-site courses and advice, and as a result of timely and skilfully managed interventions from Jobcentre Plus and Extended Schools Coordinators, most parents report increased economic independence. However, support for users with entry to high-quality training and employment is not embedded. Success in involving parents as volunteer tutors, for example running a computer club, demonstrates the kind of

positive actions that the centre has already taken in this direction.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop the involvement of the advisory board to sustain the centre's high-quality provision.
- Work closely with users to help them find high-quality training and permanent employment.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Outcomes for children and families are outstanding overall. There has been a clear focus on a number of very successful health initiatives, based on an in-depth analysis of users' needs. For example, users' attendance at baby massage and speech therapy courses are very good. A number of families have benefited from the intervention of the clinical psychologist, including parents who have been well supported with issues of child disability and difficult birth histories. Outreach counselling services are considered to be very effective by users, and take-up amongst local families is good. The centre is very successful in signposting users to other agencies through a variety of flyers and online information, skilfully co-ordinated with other centres and with Jubilee Gardens Health Centre. As a result, health outcomes for users are excellent.

Keeping children safe lies at the heart of the centre's on-site work with families, and child protection procedures and safeguarding regulations are keenly adhered to. Staff help parents and carers to reflect on different aspects of keeping themselves and their family safe, including safety in the home and in the local streets and parks. Parents feel confident when dealing with minor injuries in the home as result of advice they have received and observing staff modelling best practice with first aid. The centre's excellent record-keeping indicates the number of children linked to the centre who are subject to the Common Assessment Framework and/or child protection plans.

Children make outstanding progress from their starting points in developing the skills that will help them in the future. The centre has the experience over many years of making a real difference to families' enjoyment of, and success in, education. The personal, social and language development of the children who attend the various courses is paramount in workers' planning and delivery of courses. In the mother and toddler group, one parent commented, 'This is a lovely social place for my daughter and me. The workers really help our children's language development with all the songs and musical instruments.' Noticeboards around the centre promote the importance of play through photographs of children keenly engaged in their messy play and gardening activities.

The outdoor gardens are the source of daily opportunities for mothers, fathers and their children from different backgrounds to come together and enjoy new learning. Families mix with obvious ease and enjoyment. One parent said, 'I find this group a wonderful thing – it reduces stress.' A father commented, 'Children really enjoy this, learning what is good for you. My son likes it so much he is even learning the days of the week as he looks forward to gardening club so much.' Another parent observed, 'It's very good - when you don't have much money you can grow your own food and eat well. I've learned to do that here.' The rich outdoor provision impacts very well on children's personal and social development and securely on community cohesion and economic well-being. The consultation process with users in how the gardens were created and developed, recorded in photographs, was exemplary.

There is a well-developed system for recording parents' views about what the centre offers. This ensures that activities are fun, purposeful and suitable for the needs of all families. The outcomes for families in emotional and economic well-being are very good, with staff noting a number of cases where families have said that the centre's interventions have led to improved relationships within the family and better management of the home budget.

Information and guidance which signposts job opportunities and access to employment are available in many forms. The Jobcentre Plus adviser reports a number of very positive outcomes for individual mothers and fathers in the past few months, moving onto NVQ courses and into regular employment. Take-up rates in adult and further education programmes, for example in computing and English as a second language, are good, often prompted by positive experiences at the centre. However, the centre's support for users, to help them locate high-quality training and secure employment, is not consistently in place.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

1

The provision for families and their children is outstanding. The centre has a

deserved reputation for the way in which each child is treated as an individual. Centre staff have an excellent understanding and knowledge of the users and their individual needs and interests, founded in excellent administrative and pastoral systems. Parents speak very positively about the way in which the comments they make about the content and timing of courses, for example with English as a second language, are always taken into account when future plans are made. Partnership working is of a high calibre, commented on by all the professionals who engage with the centre.

Provision to help children learn and develop is outstanding and activities are of a high quality. For example, a visit to the fire station for families on the first day of the inspection was much enjoyed by all families. The following day, children were pointing out on the interactive television screen various photographs of themselves at the fire station, interacting with fire officers. Parents valued the chance to improve their knowledge about fire safety at home.

The attractively constructed log cabin provides a warm and welcoming environment for purposeful family learning, led by well-trained tutors who are always approachable and keep their practice under review, for example in how best to promote an understanding of basic phonics (the sounds that letters make) among children and mothers. By way of contrast, the centre arranges weekend events in neighbouring parks to ensure that different users are drawn into its activities.

Services, on and off site, are skilfully integrated and managed creatively, leading to high participation rates by users in the reach area. The charity Coram is a key provider of services to the centre. This contracted service is well led and managed, and the quality of its programme is excellent. The charity is able to respond nimbly to emerging demands and parents report that 'with the staff you feel like you are dealing with people who care about you'. Further, Coram have been conspicuously successful in working with health visitors, antenatal clinics and other statutory providers to draw into the centre's influence a number of hard-to-reach families.

Care, guidance and support are exemplary and expertly coordinated. Everyday interactions in the centre are calm and, in the words of a regular user, 'I can't think of a time when anyone has raised a voice or not listened to a child with a smile on their face.' The centre has excellent case study records demonstrating its impact on families in times of crisis. Notable examples include where the centre's actions have helped families through chronic problems with housing applications including accessing support from Shelter, while providing children with nursery places paid for through the vulnerable children funding scheme.

Through a well-planned and engaging range of provision, the centre richly achieves its core mission to 'provide a happy environment where everyone is valued and cultural diversity is celebrated'. High quality in all the centre does is its hallmark.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents
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1

and other users	
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Outstanding leadership and management by the headteacher and deputy headteacher mean the centre provides outstanding value for money. The use of resources has an excellent impact on the outcomes for children and their families. Day-to-day management runs very calmly and smoothly. All centre staff - including visiting tutors, volunteers and professionals - have a very good understanding of their defined roles and responsibilities. Teamwork is impressive and a hallmark of the centre's success. A regular and appropriate pattern of formal meetings ensures that current provision is kept under regular review, and future planning is shared thoughtfully with all staff. Performance management systems are fully in place.

The headteacher has a considerable range of expertise working with early years children and their families, and shares this with fellow leaders of children's centres across the borough. She is very well supported and challenged by her knowledgeable deputy and by Ealing's strategic manager for children's centres. Together, they have an authoritative understanding of the reach area and its populations, and are quick to identify where different approaches to outreach may be needed. For example, the centre has recently engaged Travellers' children in on-site activities and has worked with those children's mothers to guide them into regular employment. The significantly increased involvement in the centre by the Tamil community is further testimony to their efforts.

The governing body of the nursery school and children's centre is well led, reflects its community, and operates a number of effective committees. Governors know the centre well and ensure that health and safety, safeguarding and financial planning are followed through meticulously. They have worked to establish the role of the newly created advisory board which helps identify the needs of the local community. However, the role of the advisory board remains underdeveloped.

Resources are plentiful, indoors and outdoors. Users treat them carefully and centre staff keep a watchful eye to ensure surfaces are cleaned regularly and best health and safety practice is adhered to. 'Everything in its place and a place for everything,' as a parent noted. While indoor rooms are limited in number, ingenious use has been made of every available space. When the clinical psychologist asked for greater privacy when meeting with parents, the head and governors at once converted precious space to create a quiet meeting room. As a parent observed of the head of

centre: 'She is always calm and ready to listen. Nothing is too much trouble for her.' Characteristic of the centre's forward-looking leadership team, it is currently searching out space in a neighbouring school to meet increased parental demand for Stay and Play sessions.

The centre places a strong emphasis throughout its work on promoting equality, especially for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Posters and photographs around the centre celebrate diversity and achievement for all, from the gardening club and family links courses, to the computer classes and family cookery. The centre's website further demonstrates its commitment to promoting access to a wide variety of users from the local and wider community.

The centre recognises and acts in an exemplary way on its safeguarding responsibilities. Criminal Records Bureau procedures and staff checks are fully in place. The centre collaborates effectively with key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to any family members, for example social workers making speedy referrals in the case of identified domestic violence. Access for users with physical disabilities is good, both indoors and outdoors, as are toilet and nappy-changing facilities.

Resources are harnessed to maximum benefit by a wide range of users, and the leadership's quality assurance is exemplary. A significant majority of families in the reach area engage with enjoyment, and all families interviewed expressed the view that attendance at the centre has a very positive impact on their families.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the	1

range of provision	
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Summary for centre users

We inspected Grove House Children’s Centre on 16 and 17 June 2011. We are very pleased to report that we judged the centre to be outstanding. Grove House rightly enjoys a very strong reputation locally.

We spoke to a number of families during our two days at the centre, and all families spoke positively about what the centre offers to them and their children, particularly the very attractive gardens and outdoor play facilities. A number of parents said that the combination of the nursery and children’s centre on the same site is what makes it special for them and why so many families attend. As one of you said, ‘We keep it a bit of a secret here. It’s already so popular we don’t want to find everything is full up.’

Parents agreed that the centre always provides a safe, well-supervised and welcoming place to meet, and that centre staff are constantly willing to listen to any concerns they have, and offer useful advice. Parents obviously receive expert advice in helping with such issues as healthy eating, finance and housing.

A number of parents and carers shared their views on courses run by the centre that they have attended. Those mentioned which were particularly enjoyed included Legal Advice, Baby Massage, Family Cookery and Talk Time. The centre’s gardening club comes in for particular mention, for the way it brings together parents and carers from the community to enjoy high-quality learning and language opportunities for parents and children alike. We thought the colourful hanging baskets created by children and parents were superb.

We have asked those who have responsibility for leading the centre to see how more parents might be involved in the centre’s governance and advisory board, and you might be interested to help with this. The head is also keen to work further with parents, when needed, to help find high-quality training and job opportunities.

Thank you to those who found time to talk to us during the inspection days while you were busy playing outdoors with your children, even in the pouring rain! We hope you will continue to enjoy the benefits of what this outstanding children’s centre offers to so many people in the local community.

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