

# Inspection report for Discovery Children's Centre

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| <b>Local authority</b>     | London Borough of Greenwich |
| <b>Inspection number</b>   | 383426                      |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>    | 18–19 January 2012          |
| <b>Reporting inspector</b> | Joan Lindsay                |

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Centre leader</b>               | Lisa Rogers  |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b> | Not previously inspected   |
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|--|----------------|
| <b>Linked school if applicable</b>                     | Not applicable |
| <b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b> | Not applicable |

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, representatives from the local authority and the advisory group. They also spoke to partner agencies, such as the health services, parents and other users of the centre.

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

## Information about the centre

The centre was designated in 2008 as a phase two centre and achieved full core purpose in September 2009 when the new building opened. It is managed directly by the Integrated Support Children and Families Service on behalf of the local authority. The head of centre also manages two other children's centres in the local area which are now formally federated. The centre is open all year on weekdays from 8.00am until 6.00pm and occasional Saturdays. It serves four super output areas in West Thamesmead with deprivation levels ranging between 20% and 50%, as such, rates of deprivation are above average.

There are 1,465 children under five in the reach area and 64% are registered at the centre. The majority of families come from Black African heritages. Other groups include those from Asian, mixed race, Turkish and Polish heritages. The proportion of White British families is 18%. The percentage of children aged from birth to four years of age living in households dependent on workless benefits is above the national average, as is the number of eligible families benefiting from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Children's levels on entry to Early Years Foundation Stage education across the reach area are well below 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

Discovery Children's Centre provides a good service. In the relatively short time it has been fully open, it has had a positive impact on outcomes for those who use it and it has rapidly increased the numbers in the community who benefit from its services. 'It has made the world of difference to my children,' was a common view. Staff are committed, well trained and highly knowledgeable about the community they serve. They have a clear understanding of the specific groups that require intervention and support, such as those with low self-esteem. The centre is proactive in dealing with local issues, for example the rise in incidents of domestic violence.

Very strong links with a wide range of partner agencies have developed quickly and effectively so that support is available rapidly. Consequently, the provision is good and there are many examples of how families have been helped to improve their circumstances through good care, guidance and support.

Although there is clear evidence of the impact of the centre, the way some evidence is recorded and tracked by the centre and partner agencies is not consistent and not always easy to follow.

The busy, well-used centre is a highly inclusive, welcoming and secure place for the families who use it. They have very positive views about the centre, feel they have a voice there and can influence decisions. The family forum is well attended by a good cross section of families, but although target families are represented on the advisory group there is not yet a wide enough range.

Managers have a clear and accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development because self-evaluation processes are well established and involve parents well. Targets are based on an accurate analysis of local needs and, as a result, the centre is having an increasingly positive impact on those it serves despite reorganisation upheavals and staffing difficulties. This demonstrates the clear commitment of all those involved and, combined with strong leadership and

management, means there is a good capacity for sustained improvement.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Implement a consistent and effective system to record and track the impact of the centre's and its partners' work with families.
- Increase the formal involvement of those who use the centre by widening the range of families who participate in the advisory group.

## How good are outcomes for families?

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| 2 |
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Although childhood obesity levels in the area were slightly above the national average in 2010, the centre had not been open long enough to influence them. However, there is a strong awareness of the cultural aspects affecting children's weight and the centre is working effectively with various partners to give targeted advice to parents. Consequently, families who use the centre now have a clear understanding of how to lead healthy lives through, for example, cookery classes and popular keep fit sessions. Breastfeeding is promoted well in conjunction with health and voluntary partners and the sustained rates in the area are well above the national average. The large majority of children in the reach area have been immunised.

Having identified mental health issues as an area for concern, the centre has implemented a high level of support for adults and children, such as through counselling services with Greenwich MIND. Activities such as the Giggle Club and particularly the Discover Me course have been very beneficial in improving the health outcomes for families using the centre. 'I saw the light at the end of the tunnel,' was how one participant summed up the views of many. Strong partnerships with dental health and speech and language therapy have notably improved outcomes for children from all target groups.

All families using the centre feel safe there, not only because of the physical security of the building but also because they have very high levels of trust in all of the staff. Specific courses, such as first aid and parenting courses, have enabled parents to have a greater understanding in how to keep their children safe. Emergency hospital admissions for children are relatively low in the area.

A particular focus for the centre has been to protect families from domestic violence. Staff training and a proactive involvement in local groups such as the Greenwich Domestic Violence Board and the HER drop-in centre have had a positive impact on how quickly and effectively families are supported. In addition, the centre's full involvement in the use of the Common Assessment Framework and supporting families on child protection plans has been beneficial in enabling children to come off such plans.

Early years development is at the heart of the centre's work and the close links with the adjacent school and daycare facility, as well as the work of the early years teacher, complement this work well. The pre-nursery group focuses effectively on ensuring smooth transition to school. Parents develop a clear understanding of the benefits of learning through play. The Early Years Foundation Stage results in the reach area dipped in 2011 and the achievement gap widened slightly, but the centre had not been open long enough to have impacted on those children. The local authority has analysed the reasons for this dip. As a result, the centre is using the findings effectively to put in targeted support in specific areas, such as improving children's speech and language and personal development through focused stay and play sessions. Evidence from the inspection indicates that this initiative is successfully helping to improve children's skills quickly.

The centre's work to develop adults' skills has been highly effective especially in relation to their parenting, English language acquisition, and self-confidence. This has led to notable outcomes in relation to returning to work, training or education.

Children behave well in the centre and a strong focus on their personal development means they also build their confidence. The views of many parents were summed up by the comment, 'She was quiet but now she is bold as a lion!' The much-valued crèche facility also helps children to become independent and confident.

Families feel fully involved in the way the centre is run and know that they can approach staff with any ideas for changes at any time. The family forum reflects the community, although the range of families is not as wide on the advisory group. Volunteers make a very strong contribution to the centre. They not only feel they are 'giving something back to the community' but also benefit from the experience in terms of enhancing their self-confidence and skills.

Adults are given good advice and guidance to develop their skills and especially in relation to helping them return to work. Many spoke about how their lives had changed immeasurably through contact with the centre, for example through gaining employment or feeling able to participate in public speaking. Young parents have been assisted to return to work or education by the centre providing guidance on childcare and links with local colleges. Consequently, well over a third of families using the centre are engaged in training, adult learning or relevant activities.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families:

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|--|----------|
| The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles        | <b>2</b> |
| The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them                         | <b>2</b> |
| The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development | <b>2</b> |

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|---|---|
| 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

Centre staff have a good knowledge of families using the services and of the community as a whole. The numbers from all target groups, including those identified by the centre as in most need of support, for example those with low self-esteem and families where there is domestic abuse, have increased substantially over the two years the centre has been fully open. This is especially so for fathers, lone parents and disabled children. Well coordinated outreach work, undertaken by Family Involvement Workers and Family Information Services, has also been instrumental in increasing the numbers who would most benefit from the work of the centre. This, combined with high participation rates, has had a positive impact across all outcome areas.

Specific courses and activities meet parents' needs, such as the highly effective Discover Me and Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities courses. However, although the impact of the centre's work is recorded in case studies, the range of formats and the inconsistent quality of the information mean that they are not always effective tools to monitor and measure the effectiveness of progress that groups make.

The popular monthly Fathers' Brunch is attended by families who reflect the make up of the community. Some families would like more information than is available on the timetable about the specific nature of some of the new courses however.

Achievement is celebrated well with, for example, an annual event to congratulate those who have completed courses. Parents report that they have achieved 'a huge amount' in their personal development thanks to the centre.

Families using the centre are unanimous in feeling that they receive high levels of care, guidance and support. This is especially so in times of crisis when staff galvanise the expertise of the many strong partnerships that have developed, such as with the Family Information Service, Homestart and domestic violence services. This was summed up as a 'snowball effect of support' by a beneficiary. Parents and children with disabilities are given specific well-targeted help through links with the Portage Home Visitor and a clear understanding of their needs.

These are the grades for the quality of provision:

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| The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups      | <b>2</b> |
| The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups | <b>2</b> |
| The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.  | <b>2</b> |

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

The centre is very well organised and runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis despite staff and the head of centre working across three children's centres. The local authority provides constructive support and monitors the work of the centre regularly and effectively. The data provided are being streamlined and moulded to the centre's needs and are being used effectively in the centre's self-evaluation. However, whilst the centre's improvement plan is concise and identifies key priorities well, some of the targets for improvement do not use data enough to evaluate how well these are improving.

The advisory group, although recently reorganised and covering all three centres, is effective in monitoring the work and development of the centre and all partners have a shared understanding of how best to support specific local needs. This clarity of ambition and the well-integrated services mean that outcomes are already good and improving, especially for the most vulnerable families.

Centre resources, especially the small team of staff, are managed very well. The building is welcoming and areas are used effectively for different purposes, such as baby clinics, singing sessions, keep-fit and a crèche. Families make great use of the toy library and stay and play session run by Greenwich Toy and Leisure Library Association, further enhancing their children's development. Consequently, the centre provides good value for money.

The purpose-built centre is fully accessible to those with disabilities and special educational needs. The centre is highly inclusive and accurately reflects the community, with the most vulnerable groups fully included and supported, for example, through drop-in sessions to help with such things as learning English. The centre is successfully narrowing the achievement gap for families as the quality of their lives is improving, for example, through improved self-belief leading to return to work or confidence in helping their children learn.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are strong and staff are well trained. All appropriate Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out. Staff play an effective role in ensuring that assessments, such as under the Common Assessment



Framework, are well informed because of their high level of knowledge of the families involved. Consequently, children's interests are safeguarded well and the risk of harm reduced. Strong partnerships across a wide range of private, voluntary and independent groups also play a significant part in the good safeguarding.

Families were particularly eager to share their positive views about the centre and how it has helped them. Regular evaluations and surveys also reflect this positive relationship. Children's views are taken into account through asking parents to complete 'smiley faces' and through staff observation of what the youngest children enjoy. Outreach work is effective in engaging those who are not aware of the services through targeting shopping centres and other places families attend, such as health centres.

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                         | <b>2</b> |
| The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes  | <b>2</b> |
| The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups                   | <b>2</b> |
| The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties     | <b>2</b> |
| The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults                | <b>2</b> |
| 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     | <b>2</b> |
| 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 | <b>2</b> |

## Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Nothing applicable.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance [Complaints procedure: raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/guidance/complaints-procedure-raising-concerns-and-making-complaints-about-ofsted) which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Discovery Children's Centre on 18 and 19 January 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit, we looked at your centre's improvement plan and numerous other documents. We spoke to a wide range of partner agencies working with the centre as well as staff, members of the advisory group and representatives from the local authority. We also visited several centre activities taking place during the inspection such as Stay and Play, Happy Tunes, Keep Fit, the toy library and the pre-nursery group, and spoke to a substantial number of families using the centre.

Thank you for your participation in the inspection. It was very helpful to have your input. Those of you we spoke to were very positive about what the centre does for you and especially in the way your children have learned and developed and how your own self-esteem and confidence have grown. Views that summed up those of many we spoke to included, 'It's made the world of difference to my children,' and, 'It's been a complete lifeline.' Although the centre has only been functioning for a short time, the numbers who use the centre have grown substantially, especially in some groups such as fathers and lone parents. Families are already reaping the benefits, for example in knowing how to live healthy lives and how to keep your children safe and help them to learn.

The staff provide high levels of care, guidance and support because they have a well-developed understanding of the specific needs of the local area and also because there are strong, effective partnerships in place with many other agencies that can be called upon quickly to provide just the right sort of support. This covers a wide range, such as help with very sensitive emotional problems to supporting your children's speech and language development. Because there is a high degree of trust in staff, everyone feels safe and secure at the centre and this also has a positive impact on the numbers who attend and the outcomes that result. 'They are always there to help,' and, 'They have become a family to me,' were common comments.

Although the centre and its partners do record the work they do for families, this is not always done in the most consistent or easy to follow way so that sometimes it is difficult to track the progress and benefits for families. We have asked the centre to make improvements to the way the good work they do is recorded and measured so that the impact of their work can be seen more easily.

Families are fully involved with the centre and volunteers make a good contribution. The family focus group is effective in putting forward ideas and providing feedback to the centre management. However, although some sectors in the community are represented on the advisory group, the range of families is not wide enough. As a result, we have asked the centre to increase the numbers who serve on this board.

The bright and welcoming building is used well and the relatively small staff team is well trained and used very effectively across three children's centres. There is a wide range of activities throughout the week. The centre knows that some of you would like more information about new courses and is acting on this for you.

Everyone is enthusiastic and committed to improve and increase the numbers who benefit from the centre's work. There is a clear understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for development and there has already been a positive impact on many outcomes, particularly in relation to children's early development and adults' personal and parenting skills. As a result, 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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).