

Inspection report for Albany Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Enfield
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school	Eastfield Primary School URN 102017
Linked early years and childcare	Albany Children's Centre EY401136

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

The inspectors held meetings with staff, leaders and managers and talked to parents and children, representatives of the local authority and partner organisations. They observed the work of the centre and looked at a range of documentation, including parents' evaluations of activities that take place at the centre

Information about the centre

The children's centre is located in a residential area in Enfield, North London. It was designated in May 2008 in an annex and a purpose-built suite of rooms and gardens as part of Albany school, which is now closed. An academy opened on the school site and it managed the children's centre for a short while. From April 2011 up to the time of the inspection, Albany Children's Centre has been under the direct management of the London Borough of Enfield. This will continue, although a management partnership, locally called a 'cluster' arrangement, with Carterhatch Primary School Children's Centre will commence from 1 April 2012.

The centre provides a 53-place Early Years Foundation Stage childcare nursery for 48 weeks of the year and provides the full-core offer of a phase two children's centre. The work of the centre is led by the centre manager, who is also the head of the childcare provision. The centre's staff include early years practitioners, an administrator and a cook. The outreach worker and playworker posts for the community provision were vacant and had been unfilled for more than a year at the time of the inspection.

The centre serves an area that is among the 20% most deprived in the country, with high levels of ethnic and linguistic diversity. The majority of families live in social or private rented housing. Mobility in the area is high. Approximately 50% of children live in lone-parent households and 60% of families are in receipt of workless benefits. Just over 33% of the population is White British and 27% is Black African (of whom 59% are of Somali origin). People of Turkish and Black Caribbean origin

are the largest of the remaining groups at around 15% in each case. The majority of children start in early years provision with skill levels that are below the expectation for their age. A high proportion of children in the early years age group, about one third, have a recognised speech and language difficulty.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Albany Children’s Centre cares for children well in its childcare nursery and provides a satisfactory level of support overall to families living in the area. Children in the daycare thrive because of the stimulating environment and experiences offered. The centre provides a caring and warm welcome that encourages families to attend. Families attending community provision enjoy every opportunity that they take up. Most outcomes for families, although satisfactory, are limited because the range of courses for parents and family learning and support in the programme is restricted. The development of outreach and of the community programme has been at a standstill for over a year, with two key posts vacant.

The centre makes the best of the current staff resources. However, the community groups are full and a booking system has been introduced for all stay-and-play activities. Partner agencies run appointments systems for their activities. Parents told inspectors that they do not like the system but accept it is fair. One parent’s comment typically reflected how well the centre has communicated with parents to ensure they understand the rationale: ‘We know that hard choices have to be made but we support (the manager) because she does everything she can to support us.’

Throughout three changes in leadership, the centre has prioritised its work on maintaining the stability of daycare and inclusion, focusing on those most in need. The centre’s safeguarding work with the most vulnerable families, many of whom have an adult or child with a disability or health need, is a strength of the centre, with good outcomes for families. Families attending feel safe. As one parent put it, ‘our children are 110% safe here’. All safety, security and vetting procedures are in place and thoroughly implemented.

The centre’s leaders and managers know the area well. Through partnership working

the centre provides a range of services that is adequate to meet the recognised needs of the community. The centre is working to overcome historic difficulties in data-management systems to gain a precise picture of the centre's impact and reach. Partner agencies deliver a substantial part of the range of activities to support access to health, legal, education, employment and training services. Partners contribute to the centre's evaluation of its effectiveness. However, there are gaps in the centre's and partners' processes for gathering information about families' needs at the initial point of contact. Not all children's and adults' outcomes are known in detail as the centre and partners do not systematically collate information that tells them how well families do when they have received a service or move on from the centre.

Children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and English as an additional language, progress well from their starting points in daycare. Children and their parents develop their social and communication skills steadily when they attend community provision regularly. Health outcomes for families attending the centre frequently are satisfactory and their emotional well-being improves. The centre is having some positive impact on improving the attendance of families for children's two-year health and development checks.

The contribution of parents to the centre and community is satisfactory. Parents are encouraged and regularly give their views on provision, although the centre has not always been able to take responsive action. The centre has maintained adequate parental representation on the advisory board. The economic stability of families attending is satisfactory. Most of the parents using the daycare are working or studying and a few families go on to employment with the help of the centre. There are currently too few courses that parents would like on parenting and those that will build on their skills on their way to employment available in the centre.

The capacity of the centre to improve provision and outcomes is satisfactory. The manager and staff have been resilient and thoughtful in their actions. The centre's self-evaluation has sufficient input from partners. The centre has prioritised its limited staff and financial resources to secure an increase in the number of families using the centre over time and maintain satisfactory value for money. Plans for the next change in governance and accountability are sufficiently robust and embedded to bring about further improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the support of the local authority and all partners to develop sustainable services that are responsive to need and improve outcomes, in particular by:
 - taking immediate steps to plan and secure sufficient staff resources in key vacant posts such as the outreach worker and community play supervisor
 - expanding the range of courses for parents, family learning and support to parents, particularly for economic well-being.

- Work with the local authority and all partners to ensure that all contacts with families in the area and their development are recorded so that the centre can form an accurate assessment of outcomes and their effectiveness.
- Collate evaluations of all activities provided directly by the centre and by partners to inform and review services and activities.
- Collate information from partners such as schools about the outcomes for children and their parents when they move on from the centre to show the centre's effectiveness.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Children attending the centre eat well from the healthy options supplied and enjoy active play throughout the day. Children in daycare with specific medical needs are well cared for by staff who have been well trained. Access to health visitors and speech therapists is integrated into the centre's work, with good take-up of two-year-old development checks and good speech outcomes. Most babies in the area get a good start as breastfeeding rates are high, especially among minority ethnic families. However, obesity among children in Reception classes in the area is above the national average at 13% and is rising. Take-up rates for immunisations in the area are low. Families improve well-being through attending the centre's sociable stay-and-play sessions. As there are too few places to enable all families to attend, places are allocated to those who are more vulnerable because of adults' health or children's development needs, such as autism, and they are encouraged to attend.

With good and consistent guidance in the daycare and community provision, children behave well and talk to each other about taking turns when playing on climbing equipment. The centre's strong and consistent focus on child protection and joint work with the Early Intervention Team ensures that those most at risk are protected. The Common Assessment Framework is used effectively, especially to enable services to end formal intervention for the small number of children on child protection plans. Good use is made of funded places for two-year-olds to provide protective monitoring placements in the community. The centre takes an active part in setting and reviewing child protection and care plans so that intervention is focused and families' circumstances improve. Good, protective work is done in partnership with Solace Women's Aid for families who have suffered domestic violence.

Children in daycare progress well and develop their self-confidence, curiosity and communication skills in the enabling indoor and outdoor environment. One parent's remark that 'you can have a real in-depth conversation with my child (aged three) after just a few months here' is typical of many. The centre ensures a smooth transition to school for children most in need of support. 'Busy Bodies' pre-school play sessions help children to prepare for school when they are waiting for a place at nursery or school. In community provision, sessions that include children with

disabilities, such as 'Mess makers' and 'Rhyme time and play', allow children to begin to develop good social skills and positive attitudes to learning. In the area as whole, the Early Years Foundation Stage attainment gap is closing at a satisfactory rate, although, because of factors such as the high mobility of families, the impact of the centre's work on all children and closing the gap is not precisely measured by the centre.

Families supported by the centre show increased confidence in parenting skills, especially through structured parenting courses. Families from target groups, such as fathers, Turkish parents and lone parents, enjoy learning alongside their children in 'Mess makers' sessions. Parents including those with children with additional needs and disabilities comment on the independence and self-confidence that their children develop rapidly through creative play. Trust between staff and parents enables families to turn to the centre when in need. Adults, children and staff treat each other with warmth and respect, which parents say continues into their relationships in the community. The centre has maintained a parent representative on the advisory board throughout the changes in governance arrangements. Parents contribute routinely to evaluations.

Families using the daycare appreciate the accessible and flexible care provided to their children while they are working or studying, although this benefits only a small minority of families in the area. Families are efficiently signposted to agencies that provide benefits, training and employment advice. The centre has focused efforts on target groups, such as those with English as an additional language. Although fewer than 10% of the centre's community participants take up basic education and English classes, this focus is beginning to have some impact and numbers are rising. A few parents have successfully progressed through volunteering roles, for example as an oral health mentor, into work.

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	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
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	3
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	3

How good is the provision?

3

An adequate range of groupwork and one-to-one support activities to match the needs of the community is secured through partnership working. The centre reaches about a third of the children and their parents living in the area, although some access services in an adjoining children's centre. The centre has an adequate share of specific activities that are commissioned centrally, for example outreach services to fathers and counselling. Over time, staff carry out sensitive observations and involve families in assessing their needs but do not always gather full information at initial contact. Partner agencies, including health visitors, publicise the centre's programme. Assessment information from integrated speech and language therapy and early intervention services is shared effectively with daycare staff to shape provision for individuals. The centre collects attendance data well but does not routinely gather information about the eventual outcomes from all services that are provided at the centre or when families move on, to influence the development of the programme overall.

Skilled intervention by staff in the daycare promotes children's learning consistently well. As one parent said, 'I feel my child has been challenged appropriately for her to make progress.' The range of family learning opportunities and access to them for the wider community is satisfactory. However, the learning and development of parents and children in community provision is often interrupted as there is not enough provision for all to attend as often as they would like. The centre makes the most of staff resources and partnerships, for example with Enfield Library Service, to provide activities focusing on communication skills on site. The centre knows from consulting parents that families would like more exercise classes and cook and eat sessions for healthy living.

High quality daycare is the mainstay of provision at the centre. The caring attitudes of managers and staff and vigilance for families who are struggling extend to all families using the centre. The centre has been able to maintain a high enough profile in the community so that families in the wider area drop in to the centre for help in times of crisis. Parents appreciate the good access to expertise on family, health, education and finance matters, for example in the 'Baby Bloomers' birth to 16 months group. By building good relationships with those who do attend, the centre ensures that parents are able to access the services they 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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The manager of the centre has given dedicated leadership to sustain the services of the centre and keep staff focused on priorities during a time of organisational change. The centre's attendance and reach are increasing, albeit slowly. Although services have been linked to strategic plans in the local authority area, the ambition of the centre has not been fully supported with sufficient staff resources to drive forward at a good pace. The governance, reporting and line management that are planned are sufficiently clearly understood to promote continuity in the centre's work during the move to a cluster partnership in the very near future.

Managers supervise staff well and deploy them in line with their expertise. All staff in partner organisations are appropriately supervised by their own agency. The centre ensures that all legal requirements for accessibility and safety are met. Playing to strengths, the centre has built up the daycare from a low point of 50% occupancy in Spring 2011 to 85% currently, and bookings are in place for full occupancy after April 2012. The centre focuses sufficiently on inclusion of target groups and those in most need of intervention. There is some increased take-up by some groups. An example is that by using a nursery practitioner to run a monthly group for Turkish-speaking families, the centre has increased the participation of parents in courses for English as a second language. Partnerships contribute to the expansion of the range of provision. These measures have ensured that the centre has sustained at least satisfactory value for money across the whole of its programme of activities.

Senior staff have prioritised the continuity of high quality daycare and safeguarding of the families in the area. Children and vulnerable adults are safeguarded effectively because of the priority that managers and staff give to identifying and supporting families at risk or suffering abuse. The centre makes prompt and effective use of protocols for discussing and referring concerns to children's services. The environment is kept safe and secure through the use of good risk assessment procedures. It is welcoming and accessible to the diverse range of groups and individuals in the area.

The centre's management of data is satisfactory to support further improvement. Key staff are developing their skills in managing data to ensure accuracy and integration of data from daycare, community provision and partners. The centre's self-evaluation processes adequately draw on information from partner agencies and families using the centre. The great majority of evaluation ratings gathered by the centre and partners are positive, although overall the centre has given too much weight to the good outcomes for the daycare side of provision. Use of data on all outcomes as children and adults move on from the centre, for example for children at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, is not fully developed.

Consultation by the local authority about proposals for the new cluster arrangements was extensive and took on board the views of all key partners and adequate numbers of young families in the reach area. User engagement is an area of the centre's work that is developing and likely to change in the coming months with the

move to cluster partnerships.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
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	3
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	3

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

Inspectors took account of the findings of the last inspection of the Early Years Foundation Stage childcare provision that is integrated into the children's centre. It was inspected in February 2010 and was judged to be good overall. You can see the full inspection report at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Albany Children's Centre on 15 and 16 March 2012. We judged that the centre is satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank you very much for spending the time talking to us, and we wish you and your children well for the future. Here is a brief summary of what we found:

Albany children's centre provides good care for children in the nursery and provides a warm and caring welcome for all families in the community.

The managers and permanent staff have 'worked tirelessly', as one parent put it. From day-to-day, although there have been vacancies, the manager and staff have stuck to the centre's main priorities – providing stable daycare, inclusion of families who need the centre's services most and keeping families safe in the area.

Families' health and well-being improve when they attend the centre regularly. Parents appreciate the easy access to health experts through check-up sessions, and in groups such as 'Baby Bloomers'.

Staff ensure that the building is safe and secure and one parent said that they find the centre '110% safe'. Families at risk of harm or abuse are given very good help and professional support through the centre.

Children thrive in the daycare. This includes children with disabilities and those who speak English as a second language. The centre has increased the number of daycare places steadily during the last year. Children progress well because of the stimulating environment and experiences offered. Parents are very pleased with the communication skills that their children develop. One parent told us that 'you can have a real in-depth conversation with my child (aged three) after just a few months here'.

Children and parents in the community are helped to prepare for starting school. Children begin to develop social skills and positive attitudes to learning. The centre supports children with disabilities well when they move on. The centre gives some support to help families when children have not got a nursery or school place.

Parents tell the centre and told us during our visit that all the groups and activities are enjoyable. Parents and children develop their skills and confidence together in 'Mess makers', 'Rhyme time and play' and through one-to-one support sessions.

You told us that you and your children are enthusiastic about the activities provided but disappointed because you cannot attend due to limited places and therefore you do not make as much progress as you would like.

Parents routinely give their views in person or through the advisory board, although the centre is not always able to act on these views. Parents say to the centre that they would like more healthy living sessions and courses that give skills for future employment. We have asked the centre managers to work with the council and all partner organisations to quickly put right the vacancies and expand the range of family learning and support available to parents.

The centre's leaders and managers know the needs of the area by sharing information with partner organisations. There are some gaps in the processes for gathering information about individuals' needs and about how well families do when they have received a service or move on from the centre. We have asked the centre

managers, again working with the local authority and partners, to do several things to tighten up on processing this information.

We found that although the support the centre gives you at present has its limitations because of the staff resources available, the vision and ambition of the centre leaders and managers is strongly focused on improvement. Plans are in place for the further changes in the leadership and management arrangements that will happen in the near future. With continued support from partner organisations and from parents the centre has satisfactory capacity to improve.

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