

Acacia Children's Centre

Inspection report

Unique reference number	103030
Local authority	Waltham Forest
Inspection number	376802
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2012
Lead inspector	Jacqueline Marshall

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The registered childcare provision, managed by the governing body, was inspected under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	140
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Huw Jackson
Headteacher	Anne Denham
Date of previous school inspection	3 June 2009
School address	Cecil Road Leytonstone London E11 3HF
Telephone number	020 8558 4444
Email address	office@acacia.waltham.sch.uk

Registered childcare provision	Acacia Children's Centre
Number of children on roll in the registered childcare provision	40
Date of last inspection of registered childcare provision	3 July 2006

Age group	3–4
Inspection date(s)	22–23 March 2012
Inspection number	376802



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Introduction

Inspection team

Jacqueline Marshall

Additional inspector

Raminder Aurora

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in thirty six sessions and part sessions, taught by both teachers and early years practitioners, amounting to approximately eight and a half hours in total. For approximately half of the lessons, inspectors were accompanied by the interim headteacher. Inspectors held meetings with staff, school leaders, representatives of the governing body and the newly-appointed headteacher. The inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and looked at policies, including those relating to safeguarding, data on children's progress, attendance figures and the school's development planning. They evaluated 48 questionnaires received from parents and carers and 8 from staff.

Information about the school

This is a larger than average-sized nursery school. The children come from predominantly White British and Black African backgrounds. An above-average proportion is learning English as an additional language. The proportion of children who are disabled or who have special educational needs is average, comprising a range of needs, including speech and language and behavioural difficulties. A higher proportion of children than usual joins or leaves the school at other than the expected times.

The school provides 120 free nursery education places for children aged 3 to 4 years. In addition, it provides 44 childcare places for children aged 2 to 4 years. The school runs breakfast and tea-time clubs as part of its childcare provision. The children's centre, of which the school is part, provides a range of community services, and is situated at a short distance from it. This provision is inspected separately.

At the time of the inspection the school was being led by an interim headteacher. A new, substantive headteacher has been appointed and will take up her post in April 2012.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. The interim headteacher has very skilfully steered the school during a period of instability, strengthening provision to ensure its current effectiveness. It is not outstanding because some inconsistencies remain in how well all staff use assessments to accelerate children’s progress, and in aspects of the curriculum.
- All children, including disabled children, those who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language, make good progress given their starting points. Children make good gains in their communication, literacy and language skills overall, although outdoors provision does not yet match indoor facilities in promoting literacy. Similarly, whilst children enjoy using computers and cameras, expanding their skills in information and communication technology (ICT) is yet to be developed fully.
- Teaching is good. Adult-led activities are well planned to promote effective learning, as is small group and individual teaching for children with additional needs. Staff interact well with children in their play and follow up on their particular interests. Whilst all children achieve well, sometimes opportunities to use information from assessment to challenge and stretch children are missed and progress slows.
- Children love coming to the nursery. They are very safe and well looked after. Behaviour is good and children learn to consider and respect others. They challenge themselves to try new things, knowing that adults will always be there to help, and increasingly do this independently.
- Effective leadership and governance mean that both the nursery and childcare provision have improved well since the last inspection, especially in recent times. The interim headteacher has ensured that performance management processes are robust and that there is a strong and continued focus on developing teaching. Leaders at all levels are increasingly involved in tackling those inconsistencies in provision that remain.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate children’s progress by:

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- making better use of assessment information to ensure that children are always challenged and stretched in all that they do
 - ensuring all staff have a good knowledge and understanding of the next steps in children's learning and use them more effectively to adapt to children's needs.
- Raise achievement through improving the quality of the curriculum by:
- providing greater opportunities for children to use a wide range of technology as they learn
 - ensuring both the indoor and outdoor learning environments promote literacy more effectively.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Children typically show a positive attitude towards learning and work well together from an early age. Their enthusiasm for learning is reflected in their keenness to attend and their positive response to tasks that are interesting and engaging. Where learning is best, children respond with considerable concentration and perseverance to tasks that are well matched to their abilities. For example, a group of children used chalks outside to make marks and begin to form letters as a result of successful interventions by an adult. Several continued independently to label objects in the outdoor learning environment, discussing what they had written with each other and what they were going to write next. Children talk eagerly about what they have learnt and about what strategies they might need to solve the problems they face. They are clear about what they are learning, and share their ideas willingly. Sometimes, when there is less challenge or adults are less clear about the next steps individuals need to take, progress slows for some children.

Children achieve well academically. Attainment by the time children leave to join primary school is in line with expected levels in all areas of learning. Over time, children make good progress from starting points that are low as they enter as two-year-olds, and below expected levels as they enter the nursery, especially in communication, language and literacy. This demonstrates the good gains they have made in narrowing the gap with their peers nationally. Because of the strong focus on developing their speaking and listening skills, children, including those at an early stage of learning English as an additional language, make good gains in their literacy skills. Whilst there are more opportunities to accelerate children's progress through providing a word- and text-rich environment in the classrooms, some opportunities to label resources or give visual reminders are missed, especially outdoors. Similarly, children's ICT skills are less well developed as resources are not always readily available. The school ensures that different groups and individuals, such as those who are disabled and those with special educational needs, are well targeted. Children learn well in small groups and by working one to one with staff, because the work is well matched to their abilities. Inspectors agree with parents and carers that

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children make good progress.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is good. Parents and carers rightly believe their children are taught well. Staff provide a very calm, welcoming environment. Therefore, children leave their parents and carers happily, quickly find a friend and get busy. Staff plan well to promote children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, adults make good use of opportunities to extend children's speaking, including at lunchtimes, which enables them to develop children's social skills. Children discuss the menu and their preferences, and are encouraged to try different foods.

Staff have a good understanding of how young children learn, and plan varied, well-resourced activities that sustain children's interest throughout the day. Adults actively play alongside groups of children to model activities, engage children and move their learning forward. This was the case when a teacher effectively developed children's numeracy skills as they played in the sand. As buried numbers were dug up, children identified and ordered them. The teacher very skilfully ensured that children were able to demonstrate their grasp of, for example, the number five. Children clapped five claps, jumped five times and made sand pies using five spoons or spades full of sand. The teacher modelled as she counted for those less secure in their understanding whilst introducing larger numbers for the more able. Similarly, when learning is best, adults have a good overview of when children choose to work independently or with friends, stopping to provide encouragement or to pose a question that extends their learning even further. Adults regularly ask open-ended questions that challenge children and encourage them to think more deeply. Sometimes, however, questions only require a single word answer or are not closely matched to an individual's abilities. Consequently, the opportunity to accelerate progress is missed.

Children are encouraged from an early age to develop their listening skills and use these to identify different sounds. During the inspection, children, at the early stages of developing their listening skills, played lotto, matching the sounds of cars, planes and animals to their pictures. In one small group, an adult supported other children well to sound out simple words, such as 'b-oo-k', and recognise the letters that make each sound. Very good use was made of assessment to extend one child's learning further by asking where in the alphabet he would find a book, without having a picture to prompt him. Using the skills just learnt, the child sounded out the word, rightly identifying the letter 'b' as the initial sound and pointing to the 'Bb' on the alphabet. Children are encouraged to use the skills they learn in phonics (linking letters to the sounds they make) as they write independently. However, opportunities to practise and consolidate these skills are not always promoted as well outdoors as in the classrooms.

Assessments are good, ongoing and are regularly summarised in children's profiles

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then discussed with families when targets are shared. Staff meetings increasingly allow staff to use assessment more effectively to inform long-term planning, as well as to plan any changes and amendments to activities for the next day to maximise learning opportunities. However, whilst staff know children's abilities well, not all have the same level of expertise to use their knowledge whenever they are working with the children in order to consistently stretch and challenge their learning. As a result, achievement is good but not yet outstanding.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The school's positive promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a key factor in children's good, and sometimes exemplary, behaviour. Children have positive attitudes to learning, get on well together and show considerable support for one another, regardless of age, gender or ethnicity. The school's effective efforts to support the whole school community are evident in many ways. For example, their work with families who might otherwise find it difficult to access education is evident in their regular attendance. The popular breakfast and after-school clubs, as well as being a highly-valued resource for all families, are also successful in improving the attendance and punctuality of some children.

Children newly arrived at the school promptly learn its expectations for behaviour and settle quickly. Incidences of any types of bullying, such as name calling, are rare and are dealt with effectively by the school. A very large majority of parents and carers responding to the questionnaire commented positively on how well the school deals with behaviour and safety issues, and reported that their children say that they get on really with one another. Children's understanding of how to stay safe is good. This is demonstrated well by the enthusiasm and knowledge children show as they make good use of the extensive outdoor learning environment. Not only are they aware of their own safety but also take care of younger children as they play and learn together. Children have a good understanding of how to keep healthy through their willingness to exercise and enjoy their daily healthy snacks.

Leadership and management

Good leadership is underpinned by the recent appointments made by the governing body following the retirement of the previous headteacher. The interim headteacher quickly shared her very clear vision, high aspirations and her strong focus on teamwork and staff's professional development. This has helped to secure necessary improvements since the last inspection. Relative weaknesses in provision have been tackled rapidly and, although some inconsistencies remain, childcare provision now matches the good quality of that seen in the nursery. Over her two terms in post, the interim headteacher has ensured that leaders at different levels, some fairly new to their posts, are making an increasingly strong contribution to evaluating the school's work and making improvements. Already working in close partnership with the newly-appointed headteacher to develop the use of assessment further, she and the governing body have secured a smooth transition and a strong capacity for future improvement during a period of staff changes.

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Leaders, managers and members of the governing body are effective in ensuring that the arrangements to keep children safe, including procedures for vetting staff appointments, are robust and that statutory requirements are met. Working closely with the children's centre, leaders promote equality of opportunity particularly well, ensuring that all children, whatever their backgrounds or needs, make good progress. Children from different heritages get on well together because discrimination is not tolerated.

The curriculum reflects the interests of the children and takes good account of the diversity of their backgrounds. However, opportunities are missed to promote literacy through providing a text-rich environment and planning plenty of chances for children to develop their technology skills through a wider range of resources. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. Staff work hard, and successfully, to encourage cooperation, teach right from wrong, provide opportunities for awe and wonder and promote a cohesive learning community.

The Early Years Foundation Stage delivered in the registered childcare provision

- The registered childcare provision is good. Parents and carers value the care and support that staff in the school provide, ensuring that children are well prepared for moving on to the nursery and to primary school.
- Children progress well because of the wide range of activities on offer to develop their skills and understanding in all areas of learning. During their time here they feel safe and secure and develop a good understanding of how to keep healthy and safe themselves. They develop well from their low starting points because of the consistent focus on their personal, social and emotional development, their communication, language and literacy skills, and their physical development.
- Provision for children's learning and development is good. Children flourish because of the good levels of care that staff provide. Although some inconsistencies remain, weaknesses in how staff used assessment to plan well-matched activities for children that engage and interest them have been tackled. This aspect of the provision is now good. Children are now encouraged to share the rich learning environment with the older nursery children, who provide good role models.
- As a result of the clear leadership of the interim headteacher, there is a strong team ethos and a very clear focus on staff training and development. All areas of learning in the curriculum are now effectively planned and as a result children achieve well. However, opportunities for children to develop their technology skills are less frequently provided.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage of the registered childcare provision, inspected under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006

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Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage for the registered provision	2

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



26 March 2012

Dear Children

Inspection of Acacia Children's Centre, London E11 3HF

Thank you for talking to us and showing us your work during our visit. We were pleased to hear how much you enjoy coming to the school and that your teachers plan such a lot of interesting things for you to do. You get on well with one another and your behaviour around the school is good. You know how to keep safe, and be healthy. We agree that there are lots of interesting things for you to enjoy doing. We understand why you think the adults are good at helping to make you feel really safe and look after you well.

Your nursery school is good. Teachers and other adults help you to learn well by giving you good things to do. The headteacher and the staff in your school run it well. They know just what needs to be done to make it even better.

To help make your school become even better we have asked the adults there to work on two things.

- Make sure the things adults give you to do are always just right for you and help you all to learn well.
- Make sure there are more chances to use computers as you learn, and lots of signs and labels to help you with your reading and writing, both indoors and outside.

You can all help by going on being kind and considerate to one another. Thank you again for helping us with our work.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Marshall
Lead inspector

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