

# Inspection report for Linden Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Hackney
Inspection number	366539
Inspection dates	2–3 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Jane Chesterfield

Centre governance	The Learning Trust
Centre leader	Jeannie Terry
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	86–92 Rectory Road, London N16 7SH
Telephone number	020 7254 9939
Fax number	N/A
Email address	Jeannie.terry@learningtrust.co.uk

Linked school, if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Linden Nursery – EY265071

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.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester  
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

No. 100024

© Crown copyright 2010

## 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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website, [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre, the senior management team, local authority officers, a range of children's centre partners, health professionals and front line staff. They met parents and carers and other centre users, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The centre is situated in an inner-city area comprising mainly social and some privately rented housing in the London Borough of Hackney, and serves a multi-ethnic community. The largest minority ethnic groups are Black African, Black Caribbean and other White backgrounds. The borough is the second most deprived local authority in the country. Crime levels are high, unemployment is well above the national average and life expectancy is below average. Population density is very high, with over 20% of the child population living in households on benefits with no working adult. The proportion of families known to be eligible for free school meals is particularly high.

Linden Children's Centre is managed by the Learning Trust, which runs Hackney's education services on behalf of the local authority. It was designated as a phase 1 children's centre in 2007 and is the strategic centre for the four children's centres which make up the local cluster. The cluster provides families and children with a range of services, including childcare and education, family support, outreach and home visiting, community-based health services, and advice on training, employability and benefits.

Linden offers the Early Years Foundation Stage in its childcare and crèche facilities. It is registered with Ofsted to provide 48 education and childcare places for children aged from three months to five years of age. Children may attend from 7.45am to 5.45pm five days per week for 49 weeks of the year. The Early Years Foundation Stage provision was inspected during the same week as the centre. Children’s levels of development on entry to the pre-school provision for children aged 3–5 are 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 users and the wider community**

<b>3</b>
----------

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

<b>3</b>
----------

## Main findings

The children’s centre provides a good range of services for children and their families. Despite good provision and outcomes for users and many effective aspects of leadership and management, overall effectiveness is satisfactory. This is because on one occasion a safeguarding incident was found not to have been reported correctly to the appropriate authorities in accordance with requirements or in line with the centre’s own safeguarding policy. This has now been rectified. In other circumstances, safeguarding procedures have been followed robustly.

The centre promotes equal opportunities and celebrates diversity well. Children and families from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds use the centre and are provided with services to meet their needs. The centre is particularly successful in giving different groups opportunities to meet and promote their cultures, such as the German parent-child group, and in offering services in community languages, such as the Derman benefits and welfare advice facility for Turkish speakers. Festivals and events from different cultures are routinely celebrated, with the Chinese New Year currently at the forefront of activities.

Monitoring and evaluation are strong features of the centre’s leadership and management. There is close tracking of data to ensure that the centre performs well in relation to the rest of the borough. Evidence that the number of mothers bringing their toddlers for their 27-month reviews was low, for example, has been quickly acted upon, resulting in a marked improvement across last year. Monitoring of attendance at the centre has led senior staff to identify that particular groups,

namely fathers and disabled children and their families, are not making significant use of its facilities. It is currently working on identifying any barriers which are causing this, and on planning ways to include these groups more fully.

Parents and carers and other users of the centre, such as childminders, are very happy with the welcome and support they receive, and feel at ease at the centre. They know about the ways they can communicate their ideas or concerns, and feel that the centre will respond positively to any suggestions they make. Nonetheless, few of them are actively involved in the operation of the centre at a strategic level, through the parents' forum or the advisory board. Senior staff are seeking to galvanise their interest in having a greater say in how their centre is run.

Partnerships with other services are strong, leading to effective multi-agency working that supports children and families in all their areas of need. Senior leaders form a cohesive team and communicate well with one another and their staff, so that the centre operates smoothly on a daily basis. Strategic planning is well focused on appropriate priorities and self-evaluation is accurate. Now that safeguarding issues have been addressed, the centre has satisfactory capacity for further sustained improvement.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Strengthen safeguarding procedures to ensure that all incidents are reported promptly in accordance with requirements and with the centre's policy.
- Develop provision for, and engagement of, fathers and of disabled children and their families.
- Increase the involvement of users in the operation of the centre at a strategic level.

## **How good are outcomes for users?**

<b>2</b>
----------

The centre is working well to improve outcomes for its users. Breastfeeding figures are high, ensuring that babies get a good start in life. Children are helped to have healthy lifestyles through a good focus on personal hygiene in the crèche and the nursery, and are given nutritious, healthy meals. High levels of childhood obesity in the area are being tackled through the work done by the dietician service, seeing individual referrals and running healthy eating programmes for parents and carers. It is too soon to assess the impact of these initiatives.

Notwithstanding the recent error in safeguarding procedures, children are kept safe in the centre, and show from their behaviour that they feel secure and settled. Babies, toddlers and pre-school children all form positive relationships with the adults caring for them and readily turn to them if they need help. Children who have a child protection plan or who are subject to the Common Assessment Framework are well supported, thanks to the strengths in the centre's approach to multi-agency working.

Children learn and develop well in the nursery and the crèche. They are curious about their surroundings and keen to explore them. They make the most of the wide range of opportunities covering all areas of learning indoors and out. Skilled interventions by staff help to develop children’s interest and promote their language acquisition. Parents too are learning the skills and techniques to help their children progress, through the groups and courses run by the centre. At the baby drop-in group, for example, parents and carers were shown how to put together a ‘treasure basket’ full of items with different textures to enable their pre-crawlers to learn through their senses. Parents and carers are very appreciative of what the centre does to help them and their families. One parent who had attended the ‘Strengthening families, strengthening communities’ programme on behaviour management, commented, ‘My son and I have had an improved quality of life since I took part in the course.’

The centre plays a significant role in the life of the community, and members of the different community groups using the centre respect one another and work positively together. Children in the nursery and the crèche are starting to show an awareness of others and their needs, and make a contribution to the life of the centre. At lunchtime, for example, they serve themselves and clear their own plates. They are interested in the world around them and developing the social skills they need for moving on to school.

Parents and carers value the opportunities the centre offers them to improve their own education. Participation and achievement rates in adult education course are high, particularly in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Centre users have also been successful in gaining training opportunities through Jobcentre Plus, but none has yet gained employment in this way. Users are happy to contribute to centre development through informal suggestions and discussions, but only a few are currently keen to be formally involved in centre governance.

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

<b>2</b>
----------

Good use of data means that the centre is able to assess needs and target services across the cluster accurately. The centre has discovered that going beyond analysis of ethnic groups, to establish the range of languages spoken by different groups, has helped it to provide more useful support to its community. By identifying a large Polish community amongst the Other White group, for example, the centre has been able to highlight a need for maternity support for Polish mothers and provide a weekly clinic. The impact of different programmes and courses is closely monitored by asking users initially to say what they hope to gain from the provision and then asking them to complete an evaluation questionnaire at the end.

Learning and development opportunities for children in the nursery are good. They are described in full in a separate report for the registered nursery provision. The crèche is well equipped to provide a full range of opportunities in all areas of learning for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and staff are well attuned to the needs of the different age groups attending. They make good use of ongoing observation and assessment to plan activities to meet the needs of the individual children, no matter how regularly or frequently they attend.

Activities for adults are of a good quality and popular with users. The two-day course on First Aid for Childminders taking place during the inspection, for example, was vibrant and lively, giving participants plenty of opportunity to get involved. The participants were keen to learn and to get the most of the course. Childminders at their drop-in group were full of praise for the centre, saying it gave them the chance to do all their training at a convenient location. The centre recognises the successes of those who take part in its courses, and encourages them to be proud of what they have achieved. For those completing the 'Strengthening families, strengthening communities' course, for example, the centre had organised a graduation ceremony and celebratory lunch.

The range of activities offered by the centre is wide and covers different needs well, even when the overall demand for a particular service is not exceptionally high. Although teenage pregnancy rates, for example, are not the highest in the borough, the centre recognises that the need is great for those concerned. Through its 'Funky Bumps' group, it provides reassuring support and information for pregnant teenagers and their families, helping them to prepare practically for the future. Well-coordinated multi-agency and partnership work also means that the centre's work goes out into the community, visiting those in need in their own homes or where they are staying. Good outreach work takes place in the Inner London Hotel, a hostel for families awaiting permanent accommodation, helping them access the benefits and services they need. Case studies show that family needs are fully assessed and actioned, and users say that they feel well supported in a crisis. The centre has introduced a satisfaction survey to make sure that it is providing the services that users want. This showed that the satisfaction level among respondents was very

high, though the response rate itself was low. The survey was available only in English, which may have limited the number of responses. Much written information provided by the centre is available only in English, though opportunities for users to access interpreters at the centre are good.

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>

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

<b>3</b>
----------

The centre provides good value for money because it provides a good range of services leading to good outcomes for users. It has effective systems for ensuring that money is well spent. Service level agreements are routinely checked against outcomes, and the centre is not afraid to take the hard decision to decommission services which are not meeting their targets. The Learning Trust gives the centre good strategic direction and holds it accountable for its work, with clear targets set. The centre runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and all staff understand their roles and what is expected of them. Performance management arrangements are securely established, and there are good arrangements for staff training and development. Senior staff use their monitoring of the work of the centre as one way of assessing training needs. Their scrutiny of record keeping in the nursery, for example, identified some literacy needs, and so staff were given training in functional skills. This has led to an improvement in the quality of nursery records and planning.

Equality and diversity are strongly promoted. The centre is fully accessible to wheelchair users and welcoming to all users. Disabled children and their families currently make little use of the centre because the Hackney Ark, a centre providing specialist support for the disabled across the borough, is located nearby. Nonetheless, the centre is working on ways to encourage families with disabled children to use the centre and expand their network of contacts and support. This includes the development of a sensory room. Similarly, the centre is keen to encourage fathers as well as mothers to access its facilities. It is looking at different opening times, such as Saturday mornings, and new father-friendly activities as a way of achieving this.

The centre has a good policy and procedures for safeguarding and normally follows these robustly. However, a recent breach of requirements in the reporting of safeguarding incidents has led to a judgement of inadequate for safeguarding.



Required recruitment checks have been carried out on all adults who have contact with children, and these are renewed every three years. Staff have undergone safeguarding training and know the steps they must take if they have a concern. The centre works well with other agencies to protect children, and is currently working with parents to help them develop an understanding of how to keep their children safe with other adults.

Partners of the centre feel very positive about the working relationship it has established with them. One health visitor commented, 'It would be impossible to do my job without the children's centre.' It provides partners with the facilities to work, hold meetings, run courses, groups and clinics, and meet with users. The accommodation is of a high quality and is well serviced. Centre staff are very approachable to staff from other services, who value their support. The centre is very keen to listen to and act on the views of its users. In the nursery, for example, children's ideas about what they want to learn are written down and taken into account in staff planning. Parents' views expressed in the satisfaction survey and the action taken by the centre in response were reported back to them. The centre is currently setting up a suggestion board so that parents' views and the centre's actions can be permanently on display.

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<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>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>2</b>

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

The inspection of the registered childcare provision in Linden Nursery on 1 February 2011.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://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 Linden Children's Centre on 2 and 3 February 2001. We judged the centre to be satisfactory overall.

Thanks to those of you who met with us during the inspection, agreed to let us sit in on your groups or courses, or spoke to us about the centre. We were very grateful for your help with the inspection and interested to hear your views.

We found that the centre offers you a good range of activities and services, and you told us how helpful and supportive the centre was, particularly if you were in difficulties. The centre celebrates the different cultures in your community very successfully. It provides good opportunities for members of the community to meet together with others who speak the same language as themselves, or to get advice in their own language.

The centre gives you good access to health services in a convenient location, and it is successful in helping to improve the health of the local community. Parents and carers are able to have their toddlers' 27-month review carried out at the centre, for example, so that more toddlers in the area are now having this review done at the right time. The centre has strong links with other agencies in the borough, so that it can provide all users with the health, social and support services they need.

The centre told us that they are trying to make their services more appealing to fathers, and to disabled children and their families, and we have asked senior staff to develop these services further. If you belong to either of these groups, they would value your suggestions about the services that you would find useful.

In most respects the centre is well led and managed. Senior staff are particularly skilled in monitoring the work of the centre to see how it can be improved. There are good procedures for safeguarding, but we found that on one occasion these were not correctly followed. This has now been put right, so that your children are properly safeguarded at the centre. We have told the centre to ensure that this does not happen again.

You told us that you feel the centre values your ideas, and that you know the channels for making your views heard. Nonetheless, few of you are involved in the running of the centre, and we have asked senior staff to ensure that there are more opportunities for centre users to be involved in the decision-making process. We hope that more of you will take the chance to do so, and that you will all continue to enjoy the benefits of what the centre offers you and your families.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website, [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).