

Inspection report for Greenmead Children's Centre

Local authority	Bexley
Inspection number	362487
Inspection dates	24–25 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Christine Davies HMI

Centre governance	London Borough of Bexley
Centre leader	Carmel White
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Yarnton Way Nursery

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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 talked to senior managers, advisory board members, parents, staff, representatives of partner organisations and volunteers. They observed the centre's work on the main site and at other locations and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection judgements

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

Information about the centre

The centre developed from the neighbourhood nursery initiative and was among the first to be designated as a Sure Start Children's Centre in Bexley in 2006. It is one of 15 children's centres run by Bexley council. The centre's main location is within a small community centre managed by the Trust Thamesmead community development organisation, which it shares with other users. The centre manager is assisted by an administrator, play and outreach workers and a number of parent volunteers. An advisory board provides advice and monitors the centre's performance. Its membership includes a parent, representatives from local schools, community sector and partner organisations and officers from Bexley council. The centre provides the full core offer. Nearby, Yarnton Way Day Nursery provides 84 childcare places. The centre uses outreach locations including three local primary schools, an academy, parks, a health clinic and church premises with a crèche room that is approximately 10 minutes' walk away; one-to-one support also takes place in families' homes.

The centre is situated in the residential area of Thamesmead, built in the north of the borough in the 1960s. It offers a range of social and educational activities for children under five and their parents and/or carers including advice, health and education services and outreach support to families in an area of considerable deprivation. The area is among the 30 per cent most deprived in the country. The great majority of families in the area served live in social or privately-rented housing. The levels of unemployment and households claiming benefits are higher than the local and national averages. The education, training and employment prospects for children growing up in the area are lower than average for Bexley. The deepest concern locally is that there is poor access to services and poor outcomes for a large number of families moving in and out of the area, many of whom have English as an additional language. The largest group in the population served, about a third, is White British. Among the diverse Asian, Black British, Caribbean and African minority ethnic groups, there is an established community of Nigerian origin, speaking Yoruba. Recently more families of Polish, Lithuanian and other European origins have moved to Thamesmead. Over 20 languages are spoken by families known to the centre.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Greenmead Children’s Centre provides good quality support to children and families in the Thamesmead area of Bexley. The centre is managed well to overcome the day-to-day difficulties of running a full programme that is well matched to the needs of the area within limited space. Inclusion drives the work of the centre. The energetic teamwork of all staff ensures welcoming, purposeful activities are set up to meet existing users’ needs and attract all potential users. As a result, families feel included; many parent and carers told inspectors throughout the visit that ‘The toddler group is not cliquey, not like others I went to’ and ‘anyone will feel welcome to join in’.

Partners work closely with the centre to ensure that thoughtfully integrated services are in place and the health, wellbeing and safety of young families is improving. Excellent partnership work with the local health centre services helps the centre identify and immediately reach out to new children and families as they come into the area. Outreach work ensures the centre is in contact with almost all families. Data is shared effectively for the centre to have a clear understanding of the challenges faced by groups in the community locally, such as the impact of the recent rapid rise in worklessness in families. Good links with family learning providers, statutory child protection agencies, health service and education providers ensure that families, including those who speak English as a second language, can access services.

The range of activities is broad and the work is of high quality. Early years playworkers continually adjust the flexible programme to meet users’ needs. Health outcomes and the resilience of many users to meet challenges in their lives are improving. Nurture and guidance benefit diverse families as they take up healthier eating, their children are well prepared to move on to school and parents gain confidence in their caring skills. Good information is provided by staff at the centre although the range of help available to assist parents in the area in finding work and training is limited. Outcomes for children and adults learning at the centre and those looking for work or training are hampered by the lack of information and communication technology resources available for use by the centre.

The centre gathers information carefully from users to assess their needs at the start of their contact. Agencies already working with families supply helpful information for

workers to plan activities for them. Outreach work promotes purposeful learning and access to services well. The needs of groups in the community are well known, although the centre does not fully make use of the information it has about the progress that users are making and their changing needs to secure even better outcomes. The centre's overall evaluation of its work effectively draws on basic user data, information from partner agencies and surveys in order to shape future activities and services. Take-up and continued attendance are high.

Leadership and management and the use of resources are good which represents good value for money. Management structures, plans and provision are effectively matched to strategic plans for the wider area and the advisory board has the skills to hold the centre to account. The centre fulfils its statutory duties for tackling discrimination and promotes safeguarding well. Premises are kept safe through the constant vigilance of staff, although the centre does not routinely make use of the thorough risk assessments carried out by individual staff to improve the safe use of the whole premises and garden. Through the enthusiasm of staff and the parents' forum in publicising the centre's work, it has had real impact in bringing groups in the community together locally. Staff are motivated to work to high standards by a shared sense of purpose to make improvements in people's lives. Users' views are sought and acted on in a variety of ways and users feel confident to speak out about the type of provision they would like to see, such as the cookery programme for older children.

Given the strong partnerships, the sound basis of responding to users' views and the achievements of the centre in contributing to the inclusion and the health and safeguarding of users, the centre has good capacity to build on its good provision and further improve outcomes.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The centre should collate the assessment information it holds on individuals regularly to gain an overview of how well groups are being served at any one time.
- The centre should ensure that health and safety risk assessments are reviewed regularly and that risk assessments for individual activities contribute to managers' assessment of overall risk.
- The centre should work with the London Borough of Bexley and partner agencies in the community to improve access to information and communication technology for children and adults using the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Health outcomes are improving strongly as a result of the centre's excellent partnership work with health visitors and clinics. Outreach, following up new leads from health professionals, ensures that almost all families in the area are introduced

to the children's centre and their initial needs are known. The centre focuses many of its warm and nurturing group activities on promoting healthy living which, although still not as good as elsewhere in the Bexley area, has led to impressive improvements to family well-being locally. The work of the centre in enabling families, including those with English as an additional language, to take up services, such as health visitor baby clinics, is widely recognised as outstanding by health and community partners. Children are now getting dental treatment to prevent tooth loss and receiving immunisations in good numbers. Babies who are vulnerable due to poor weight gain are thriving because of regular health surveillance and consistent guidance by skilled professionals. Popular 'Minichef' sessions are having a good impact on healthy eating. Counselling and support services have increased the length of time that a good percentage of mothers sustain breastfeeding. Users report improvement in their well-being through relaxation and baby massage sessions and there are waiting lists for this activity.

Children using the centre and the parents and carers who look after them are safe. The centre works closely with other services to intervene early when there are difficulties for a family, to reduce the likelihood of children having a protection or care plan. Users say that they trust the centre's confidential approach. The centre provides a good service for the few who have a statutory plan or a Common Assessment Framework plan in place and continues to work seamlessly with them once plans have ended. Staff ensure, through vigilance, that users are safe when they are taking part in the centre's activities, no matter where they are. Parents say that activities like 'Tots to toddlers' help their children to behave well and make safe choices.

The extent to which children and their parents achieve educationally and develop skills for the future is good. Children begin at the centre from very low starting points. Although no formal Early Years Foundation Stage profile assessments are done by the centre, staff find that children make good progress and are well prepared to start school because they gain positive attitudes to learning and develop their social and language skills. The centre actively helps children to have a smooth transition to school by play worker visits. Children with targeted support from the speech and language team and who are monitored closely make good progress to catch up with their peers. Gifted children have the chance to shine in 'Baby Ballet' and 'Soccertots' and in French classes.

In well-attended play sessions such as 'Ready to go', children and parents learn new vocabulary, and enjoy creative music and messy play. Parents, including fathers, enjoy the chance to learn with their children and gain confidence in parenting skills. Parents told inspectors that because of the centre's constant encouragement and support, they are now successfully making the first steps to economic independence and stability. Popular first aid courses are, for some parents, the first formal learning they have done since leaving school. However, the greater potential for children and adults to learn through information and communication technology and to use technology for searching for work, as parents would like to do, is limited as there are no effective computer resources available to the children's centre.

Adults and children develop sound relationships through participation; users treat each other with respect. All users are positively encouraged to comment on services and have been influential in evaluating services. An active and enterprising Parents' Forum channels the views of users to the board and managers. Parents are involved in setting up highly successful activities such as an 'International Day' in which users, including extended families, had the chance to learn about the food, languages and cultures of other users. The forum successfully attracts positive support from the community and regular donation of funds from local businesses.

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

How good is the provision?

2

Assessment is used to ensure that individuals' needs are met. Information about children and their parents and/or carers is gathered carefully by centre staff when users start to attend. Outreach workers are highly effective at identifying the needs of individuals. Staff monitor users' progress through good observation. However, after strong initial assessment, except when specialist and targeted services are provided by partner agencies, there is no systematic update. Information known to staff about individuals is not regularly reviewed and collated, consequently the changing needs of groups are not fully known.

The centre promotes contact and access to its purposeful learning and development opportunities energetically through outreach. Children's centre staff visit pre-schools and community groups in the area and carry out visits to vulnerable families in their homes to publicise helpful activities. Users appreciate the provision that is suggested to them and some new users fill their weeks with visits to different activities at the centre.

The quality of activities provided for children and parents for their learning and development is very good. All the group sessions observed by inspectors were good

or outstanding (about a third) and user satisfaction measured by the setting is overwhelmingly positive. Planning and evaluation of provision for the differing needs of parents and children attending is rigorous. Inspectors saw an impressive range of techniques and good resources used to communicate effectively with parents and children who have English as an additional language. Playworkers demonstrate interesting ways of questioning children, for example during water play and music activities, that parents say help them to play with their children at home. Staff recognise and praise achievement in children and adult users which has a positive impact on users' self esteem and their progress.

The range of services offered is broad and coherently links with other services to meet the needs of the community well. Good communication ensures partners work effectively to protect the most vulnerable and that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are identified early and referred promptly. Services go on working together effectively for families when intensive protection work or care plans finish. Parents with additional health needs are assisted in getting access to a good range of specialist services. The 'Sisters' group for women of African heritage, targeting those who do not have access to public funds and services, is a highly successful example of the integrated support offered. It has enabled this disadvantaged group to get care, play and education services for their children and improve their own health.

The quality of care, guidance and support is good as staff are knowledgeable about their own and other services. The good personal development and parenting expertise offered is having a great impact on improving the wellbeing of participants by users' own assessments. The provision of up-to-date information about job vacancies and how to contact agencies that can support parents in preparation for employment or training is satisfactory. Staff understand that most parents using the centre are focusing their attention on bringing up their children and few are seeking work or training at present. Guidance that boosts parenting skills is delivered seamlessly within broader play and learning sessions.

Families who have been considered hard to reach say their time at the centre is enjoyable. Provision is good overall, and some groupwork is excellent but would benefit from access to computers and the internet to improve the range of guidance and learning opportunities.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2

The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2
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How effective are the leadership and management? **2**

The arrangements for making decisions based on well-managed data are clear and workable. The capable advisory board provides useful oversight, contributing strongly to the centre’s understanding of the population and the challenges facing them in the area. Policies and procedures and overarching aims are closely aligned to those of key health and children’s services partners.

Good partnership work enables the centre to target outreach services successfully and promote coherent planning. This ensures that local services are integrated. Cohesive provision is improving users’ lives, particularly in safeguarding and access to health services and is contributing to improving Early Years Foundation Stage achievement for children in the area. Good communication with partner agencies and professionals by staff at the centre ensures that action is taken to protect children and families at risk. The emphasis on nurture and welcome by staff adds to a sense of security for all parents and carers, which they say enables them to relax and enjoy learning with their children.

Day-to-day management of the centre is effective, ensuring that a good programme is provided. Staff appraisal systems are in place; regular evaluation and quality monitoring ensure that the quality of work is consistent high. There are limitations of working within shared accommodation and the centre does not always make best use of the risk assessments done for each activity to gain an overview of potential concerns. However, managers tackle most of the difficulties effectively and take prompt action to ensure that the locations in which activities take place are made safe, welcoming and as accessible as possible for all users.

The centre’s emphasis on access for all groups in the diverse community is good. Enthusiastic staff work hard to make activities appealing to users and take account of comments from external partners. As a result of the centre’s inclusive approach, the programme achieves good levels of satisfaction among users, many of whom say they enjoy making a contribution as volunteers or getting involved with the centre’s work through the enterprising parents’ forum as a way of ‘paying back’.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2

The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
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 evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
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	2

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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Greenmead Children's Centre on 24-25 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

Inspectors thank the parents, carers, partners and volunteers who gave their time to tell us about the work of the centre.

Those of you we spoke to told us how much you enjoyed the variety of activities which are active, fun, informative and help you and your children to learn. You also said you find the locations convenient on the whole and safe, secure and welcoming.

We found that the centre gives good support to children under five and their parents and carers. We agree with you that the attitudes of the staff are welcoming and help you all to feel that you have a place at the centre and can benefit from what is on offer. One person said 'anyone will feel welcome to join in'. The programme of activities and visiting is well planned to help as many children and parents in the community as possible. The quality of groups and activities is very high – all the sessions that inspectors saw were good or outstanding.

We found that the work done by the centre is having an effect on helping children and their parents develop and is helping with all-round health and well-being. All parents, carers and children who use the centre regularly begin to make healthy choices. Some groups of people, especially women who cannot work and those who speak English as an additional language have been helped a great deal by the centre to tackle the challenges they face and their lives are improving. Children develop good communication and social skills and are well prepared for the start of school life. Some parents find the centre helpful because it gives them the first chance to take up learning since they left school. We hear that you tell workers at the centre what activities you enjoy, like the 'Soccertots' and 'Minichefs', which helps them plan future events to suit you.

We were really pleased to hear about the initiative the Parents' Forum takes in planning holiday activities, getting donations and raising awareness of the centre among local businesses. From the photos that inspectors saw, the international day was a great success.

Safety of children and users is a high priority for the centre and it is warm and welcoming. The staff do as much as possible within the limited accommodation there is to include all groups in the community and to ensure that the services meet their needs. We have asked the centre managers to look at how they assess the risks that there are overall in the main building so that even better use can be made of the premises, including the garden.

The centre works well because it uses all its resources well but your learning and information searches could improve and children could develop even more rapidly if the centre had access to computers. We have made a recommendation that the centre, other organisations and the council should look into how they can provide computer support.

The higher levels of management and day-to-day management of the centre are good. We have made some recommendations about what the centre needs to do to make the centre even better. For instance, managers should be more systematic about looking over the information about users' needs so that they always have an up-to-date picture, as things change. Centre staff are very skilled and their great teamwork enables the centre to run as well as it can. As a result, high numbers come and enjoy what the centre has to offer.

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