

Inspection report for Acton Park Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Ealing
Inspection number	362422
Inspection dates	27–28 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Chris Kessell

Centre governance	London Borough of Ealing
Centre leader	Sheila McCabe
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Carousel Nursery EY348473

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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 two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with centre users, managers and staff, outreach workers, partners and representatives from the local authority. They visited provision at the Acton Vale Community Centre and outreach staff based in the Sunlight Nursery at South Acton Children's Centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation and data.

Information about the centre

Acton Park Children's Centre was opened in 2007 and is governed, lead and managed by the London Borough of Ealing. The centre comprises of a community room, nursery and outside play area. Early education and childcare is commissioned by the centre and operated by a private company. The centre is used for a wide range of timetabled drop-in activities for children under five and their families. The centre is open at the weekends. An after-school club operates for children from 4 to 12 years. This was not open during the inspection as it was half-term.

The children's centre provides activities and services at the Acton Vale Community Centre and the Maples Children's Centre. The centre is part of a cluster of four children's centres known as the Acton Quadrant and provides all elements of the core offer through its work in the Acton Quadrant. The centres work closely together to bring linked services to the local community. This includes integrated childcare and early learning, health services, outreach and family support. Outreach services are facilitated by Coram, a voluntary organisation commissioned by Ealing.

The centre serves an area that has been identified as highly disadvantaged. A significant number of children live in workless households who claim out-of-work benefits. Areas within the centre's catchment are in the top 20% most deprived in England. The area has a large number of families from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. There is a highly mobile population and a rise in new communities

from eastern European countries such as Poland. Most children in the area enter early years provision with levels of attainment that are below average.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Acton Park is a good children’s centre. It works well with its partners to provide cohesive and well-directed services that meet the needs of the vast majority of its users. Consequently, the outcomes for users are good and improving. Users comment positively about the enjoyment they get when they attend the centre especially with their children. ‘We enjoy playing with our children and working with the staff,’ is a typical comment. They talk about how their children rapidly develop their social skills and become more confident when moving to the nursery or playgroup. Users have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to attend cookery sessions where they acknowledge they have been presented with good and practical ideas for healthy packed lunches and meals. Caring and individual attention is provided to users indicating that the centre understands the needs of individuals and specific groups. For example, parents and carers are able to access one-to-one clinics to work with a dietician to discuss issues such as obesity, underweight and allergies. Successful classes are provided for ‘fussy eaters’ and there is a monthly weaning group at the Acton Vale Community Centre. Users commented that they were impressed by the opportunities to help their children develop their speech and language through the regular ‘Stay and Play’ sessions.

Parents and carers feel that their views count and are confident that if they offer suggestions, they will be listened to. For example, they can influence play activities and know that the centre will do its best to provide an activity if it is suggested by parents and carers. Despite this positive view, users are not always confident that they know exactly what is always happening at the centre or at the other venues unless they made a point of visiting. One reason for this is that the centre website provides little information. Users have little knowledge of the Advisory Board and

how they can contribute to the running of the centre.

Those in charge of the centre have an accurate understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. Through the local authority, a large amount of data is collected from a number of sources such as health services. However, much of this data are too general, for example providing information about the Acton Quadrant rather than specific outcomes at Acton Park. Despite this, staff have a good understanding of users' needs, including those who are the most vulnerable due to their circumstances. Outreach services are effective in engaging families and individuals. The centre regularly seeks the views of its users through satisfaction surveys and asks for children's feedback, for example at the after-school club on the 'graffiti wall'. The 'Story Catching' process is beginning to contribute to evaluating the progress of individuals or a specific resource but, overall, systems to evaluate the impact of provision are not yet robust enough. The overall performance of the centre has continued to improve. There has been a significant increase in centre users and their satisfaction. Outcomes are strong and the centre has a good capacity to improve even further.

The centre is inclusive and welcoming to all. There are successful strategies to engage users who are judged to be vulnerable, those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those new to the community. For example, the centre has successfully made contact and works with Somali families who are recent arrivals to the area. The centre is a cohesive community and families from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds value its work. All users appreciate the kind, friendly and welcoming environment it offers. The centre employs good safeguarding practices. Staff are appropriately trained and children and other users are safeguarded well. Users say that they feel safe and are able to speak freely and confidentially to staff if they have any issues or concerns. The centre is proactive in promoting safety through its services and activities, such as parenting classes and visits from the police and fire-brigade. There are strong links with the multi-agency team Supportive Action for Families in Ealing (SAFE) and an early intervention worker is linked to the centre to provide additional support and advice.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the monitoring of services and activities across all user groups by developing evaluation systems and making better use of data.
- Improve communication with users by ensuring that all lines of making contact are better used and by providing users with information on how they can contribute further to the running of the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for the children, families and individuals who use the centre are good. Physical and emotional health is promoted effectively through a range of well-run services and activities. The local health centre provides families with access to a wide range of services for babies and young children. Parenting courses have brought improved outcomes for children as they have become better behaved, and stress levels have been reduced for parents and carers, especially mothers. 'Baby Massage' and 'Bumps to Babies' sessions were set up especially for users with children under one as this was recognised as a gap in the service. Emotional health is supported successfully by providing counselling and helping mothers who suffer from post-natal depression to cope better and improve life for themselves and their families. Parents and carers are supported well to improve their families' eating habits and recognise which foods are healthy and which are not. Children are successfully encouraged to be active through well-organised activities at 'Stay and Play' and the wide range of outdoor activities provided.

Parents and carers state that they are extremely happy with the facilities at the centre and the emphasis placed on health and safety. Play Service workers are skilled at sensitively intervening when, for example, parents and carers are holding babies unsafely. Surgeries are available where families can access support and advice from a family support worker and a social worker. Considerable support is provided for families under stress, children with behavioural issues and victims of domestic violence. Parents and carers acknowledge that their confidence to keep themselves and families safe is improving. Strong inter-agency and dedicated centre staff ensure that children supported by the Common Assessment Framework are well cared for. Staff are well trained to ensure that the welfare of users has a high priority. Childcare and nursery provision is good and children make good progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Parents and carers are happy and relaxed that their children can play and explore in a happy and safe environment. Both parents and carers and children gain confidence in these surroundings. Parents and carers in particular begin to develop a greater understanding of how to keep themselves and their families safe. Good support is available for children with speech and language difficulties through individual referrals by health visitors, schools and outreach staff or by users 'dropping in' at 'Stay and Play' sessions. Adult users express a high level of enjoyment when using all the services of the centre. Good emphasis is placed on supporting parents and carers back to work especially lone parents who find preparing for work difficult because of the age of their children and inexperience of employment.

Children behave well. Relationships across the centre are good. Consequently, users become more self-assured as a result. Users have many opportunities to

communicate their views and make requests. Although a few users are involved in the management of the centre through the Advisory Board, there are limited opportunities to work alongside the leadership team to evaluate provision and to form action plans. The success and popularity of the centre in improving the outcomes for its users are well illustrated by the good rate of participation of its parents and carers, children, families and individuals.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

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, 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	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre is effective at assessing the needs of families who use its services. Staff have an accurate knowledge of the centre's hard-to-reach groups. Good partnership work between the centre's senior staff and other agencies helps to facilitate this. Outreach services work well in partnership with the centre to identify and support current and emerging needs. Effective analysis of data supports the identification of needs, but good consultations by local outreach workers often identify emerging needs before data have been collected. A strength of the centre is the successful work in the local community, which through events such as Fun Days, is used to evaluate community circumstances and needs and identify what users would like to see in their centre. Assessment is also used well to develop and improve the current work of the centre. For example, the centre's dietician worked successfully with parents and carers and their continued interest and enthusiasm were extended to a six-week course on planning, shopping and preparing inexpensive meals.

Early years childcare commissioned by the centre at the Carousel Nursery and the onsite childcare provision at the centre provide good experiences for children to learn

through play. Enjoyable activities such as 'Googly Eye' Halloween session during the inspection provide enjoyable activities that successfully promote children's development. Guidance and support offered to families and individual users on health issues such as breast feeding and being healthy or help to find employment make a significant difference to their lives. Provision is well integrated and linked because those who contribute to the management and running of services work well together. Consequently, adult users have good opportunities to gain confidence, learn and improve their personal skills. Individual needs are well catered for. Case study evidence indicates that the centre is good at supporting those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
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

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The leadership and governance of the centre is good. The strong partnership that exists between the centre and other services ensures that there is a strong focus on making sure that the needs of the local community are served well. The centre is especially good at engaging its users, promoting play with children, parents and carers offering a secure and welcoming environment. The centre is well positioned to address any changes to the community profile, for example the arrival of a new minority ethnic group. The local authority is effective in ensuring that there is good service delivery and that commissioned services are challenged and well managed. The Acton Quadrant of four children's centres offer users a good range of services and the local authority is successful at developing its children's centres as a whole borough wide service. Local targets are used well, but longer term strategic targets are still developing because local authority data for its centres are not yet specific enough to provide information about the overall success and effectiveness of services and activities to users. This limits the effectiveness of the overall centre evaluation process, although current priorities for development are relevant such as increasing the number of activities at the local community centre.

Managers take account of users' views especially through regular satisfaction surveys which are always very positive. The centre is ready to respond to users' needs. However, parents and other users are not an active or influential body in terms of the leadership and management of the centre. The centre is able to identify users who are not necessarily benefiting from all of its services and activities. These distinctions enable managers to provide services for those who need them and to ensure that outcomes of users are good. As a result, the centre offers good value for money.

Safeguarding provision and procedures are good because they are a high priority at the centre. Staff receive regular training especially with regard to child protection and safeguarding protocols. Rigorous checking and monitoring ensure that those who work with children and vulnerable adults are suitable. A notable feature of the centre's safeguarding is the good attention paid to risk assessments especially with the outdoor areas and play equipment. Regular surgeries are in place where users can seek support and advice.

Equality and diversity are actively promoted. Good attention is paid to community members and religious customs and beliefs are regularly celebrated. There has been success in engaging families and fathers in centre events at the weekend. The centre provides well for particular groups such as Somali and Polish families. Those users who speak English as an additional language or have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive effective support to enable them to access services and activities. Strong partnership working across a wide range of commissioned services and other agencies enables the centre to be successful in its delivery of services and improving the outcomes of its users.

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	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	3

and activities	
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

The early years childcare commissioned by the centre at the Carousel Nursery was also inspected by Ofsted in October 2010 and the quality of childcare and education was judged as good.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Acton Park Children's Centre on 27 and 28 October 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you to those of you who took time to talk with us about the centre. It was helpful to get your points of view on how the centre helps and offers support especially through its play activities. The discussions with you also enabled us to understand that although most of you hold the centre in high regard, your opportunities to be involved in its leadership and management are limited. We have asked the centre to improve this situation and ensure that it uses as many ways as possible to communicate with you so everyone knows what the centre has to offer.

The centre is welcoming and safe. Its procedures for making sure that children and vulnerable adults are protected from possible harm are good. Good attention is paid to the outdoor play area and wide range of play equipment.

The centre meets the needs of users effectively through its activities and services. The managers know the community well and do their best to ensure that you are offered services that meet everyone's needs. The centre and local authority work well with other agencies like the health service to help families and individuals in the

local area. It was good to see many of you enjoying the activities provided in the Acton Vale Community Centre.

It is clear from the satisfaction surveys that you complete that most of you find the activities and services helpful and supportive. We have asked the centre to further develop its methods for checking how useful and effective activities and services are.

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