

Inspection report for Vista Field Children's Centre

Local authority	Greenwich
Inspection number	362612
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Michael Kubiak HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Beverley Bernstein
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Places for Children Nursery and Peter Pan Crèche

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents and carers, prospective parents and carers and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents and carers, prospective parents and carers and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Early Years Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, children's centre teacher, senior leadership team, local authority lead officer, members of the advisory group, staff, members of the quality improvement team, members of the Eltham Extended Schools Cluster, members of the Families Information Service, the family involvement worker, crèche and nursery managers, and partner agencies, including representatives from the health service. They had formal and informal discussions with parents and carers and children, and visited 'Stay and Play' sessions, a typing course, the nursery and the crèche.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its action plans, evaluation of services, data about people who attend the centre and case studies.

Information about the centre

Vista Field Children's Centre was designated in 2007 and is run by Greenwich Council. The core staff team at the centre is directly employed by the council. An advisory board, made up of community representatives and users of the centre, helps shape the service. The local population is mostly White British, with smaller percentages of other minority ethnic groups including Eastern Europeans. Around 38% of children under five in the area are living in unemployed households, which is more than double the national average. The centre's catchment area is one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. Attainment on entry to the nursery is below average. Around 68% of children achieve a total of at least 78 points across the Foundation Stage Profile with communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional development, being the weaker elements.

The centre is open on weekdays from 9am to 5pm and on some Saturdays. It is open for 50 weeks of the year. The children's centre is located on two sites, within

close proximity to each other. Both buildings have access to outside play spaces. A nursery, run by Places for Children, and crèche, run by The Greenwich Pre School Learning Alliance, provide childcare facilities at the centre. These provisions were not inspected as part of this visit but will be inspected separately.

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

Overall effectiveness of the centre is good. Parents and carers and users of the centre value the welcoming, safe environment it offers and the good range of services it provides. Risk assessments are undertaken across the centre. Recruitment procedures are rigorous and robust, and ensure that centre staff are suitable. Safeguarding policies and procedures are understood by staff and effective information ensures that users are clearly safeguarded. Staff are proactive in reaching out to parents and carers who may find it hard to access the centre, and accompanied initial visits help those hard-to-reach families to learn what it can offer and benefit from its services. Systems are in place to ensure that any new parents and carers who do not access the centre are reminded of the services that it offers.

Those in charge are demonstrating a clear vision and have an accurate understanding of the centre’s strengths and areas for improvement. Staff have a thorough knowledge of the community and its changing needs, and the centre has established itself as an integral part of the community. The local authority and the advisory board set some strategic targets for the centre but these are too broad and are not sufficiently challenging to bring about improved outcomes for centre users.

The early intervention work with those children and families who need it the most is making a big difference. The centre has strong links with other key professionals, such as health visitors and midwives. Parents and carers value the early intervention which is achieved through specific support and, as one parent reported, ‘its access to services that would usually take months to get access to’. The good partnerships that exist with other agencies ensure effective working practices, such as information sharing and signposting to other services. All safeguarding requirements are met.

Outcomes for users reached by the centre are good and improving. Users are responding well to activities such as working on the local allotment and running a

safety stall, and courses such as first aid, DIY and typing. These are often over-subscribed and additional courses are then offered. There is a lack of long-term planning in relation to training courses that will encourage users to build on their knowledge and skills. The work of the Eltham Extended Schools Cluster, of which the centre is a member, has been successful in providing summer activities for children across a wide age range, including a number of summer trips. Professionals are invited to attend some sessions to help parents and carers gain a better understanding of how to improve outcomes for their families. For example, information is provided about oral health, therefore enabling users to take better care of children's teeth. Parents and carers and children attend and enjoy a range of sessions, including 'Stay and Play', which are run at the centre's two buildings and at other venues within the community. Parents and carers value the support they receive from the centre in helping them feel less isolated and supporting them in building up links. The centre is inclusive and users benefit from positive relationships as they and centre staff treat each other with respect and consideration. The centre recognises the particular need that parents and carers of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities may have and a specific group caters for them. The centre listens to users' views and takes them into account when planning future activities.

The centre has clear management and staffing structures. There is a strong sense of teamwork and shared goals, and staff show a clear commitment to the centre's work and to improving services in order to reach more families, including fathers. Members of the senior leadership team work well together and have a shared ethos which is evident throughout the centre. The senior leadership team uses available resources and data to recognise strengths, identify gaps in service and increase the centre's effectiveness. The centre's action plan lacks rigour and specific measures of outcomes. Senior leaders and managers successfully monitor progress on outcomes for current users. Targets are in place but not all are sufficiently measurable to show the full extent of the work of the centre. However the individual outcomes for users of the centre are good and improving. As a result, the centre's capacity to improve further is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority and advisory board should strengthen governance arrangements by providing robust support and challenge linked to improving outcomes.
- Improve the rigour of self-evaluation and action planning by ensuring that they identify relevant targets and quantifiable success criteria for the centre.
- Further develop systems of data recording in order to demonstrate more clearly the impact of services on outcomes for users.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The outcomes for users of the centre are good and improving. A systematic approach to recording data and analysis is being developed to reflect the outcomes in a more comprehensive way. Parent questionnaires, feedback forms and discussions with users show that satisfaction levels are very high and that parents and carers are benefiting from the wide range of services on offer. Parents and carers report that they feel less isolated and are well supported by centre staff. Courses such as 'nutrition on a budget' have introduced healthier food for their children. Alongside this, groups such as the under-fives gym encourage the children to become more healthy through exercise. Parents and carers feel that they and their children are safe. They have an increased understanding of accident prevention in the home and first aid through accessing the safety equipment loan scheme and first-aid training.

Users say that attending a range of centre activities helps them to make new friends. This is making a good contribution to developing their well-being. Users of the centre make a positive contribution to the development of activities, for example by establishing a Dads group and becoming centre volunteers. Users have the opportunity to feed issues through the Family Forum, which meets regularly with the centre leadership team. Available courses are valued by parents and carers and courses such as 'How to help your child to learn' equip them with the skills to better support their children's learning. Parents and carers talk confidently about enjoying the courses and how they want to develop in preparation for the world of work. Progression routes through training for users are not always clear and the courses do not build on previously taught skills and are not ambitious. Users have the opportunity to gain recognised qualifications such as food handling. The centre has good links with the local community centre where additional training opportunities are offered.

'Stay and Play' sessions are well attended, both at the centre and other venues within the local area. Children actively enjoy the sessions and benefit from the range of resources available. The centre staff obtain feedback from parents and carers about any topics they would like to discuss or obtain further information on and the centre arranges for other agencies and partners to come to the sessions to talk to the parents and carers informally. Good links are made between all of the services. Activities such as the 'Rhymeathon' are promoted within all of the groups and this culminates in a 'Rhymeathon Day' where they all come together. The different organisations work closely together to provide a smooth transition for the children between the different services.

Effective partnerships and secure systems ensure staff in different services identify and refer families who may be at risk of harm. Centre staff build good relationships with families so families feel able to engage with professionals to access help. There is evidence that the common assessment framework and 'team around the child' referrals are improving outcomes for users. One parent commented that the centre staff, 'Really seem to care'.

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	3
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.	3

How good is the provision?

2

The centre provides a good range of integrated services and activities which are well matched to the needs of users. Parents and carers are seen as individuals and the centre assesses their needs effectively to ensure that those with the greatest level of need are prioritised. Good relationships are established with an extensive range of key partners, including health, social care, oral health and the Families Information Service. These ensure that families receive a coordinated approach. Home visits are provided to support those who have difficulty accessing the centre. The staff use their knowledge of the services available to help families to engage with other services. The recent midwife session at the centre has ensured that parents and carers access the centre when their children are still very young and this ensures that new parents and carers are quickly made aware of what the centre has to offer. Activities and services are advertised well through effective links with other providers and community groups, including the local schools and the community centre. Excellent signposting ensures that users are able to have access to a range of information. The users report that if the centre is not able to answer their questions immediately then they are proactive in seeking out the appropriate answer and feeding it back to the parents and carers. The centre assesses the needs of all groups to ensure they are able to provide a good level of support and guidance. Crèche facilities enable parents and carers to attend courses at the centre, such as the typing course. The qualified teacher provides guidance and support to the crèche and nursery, and works with them to ensure consistency and to improve the services where shortfalls are identified.

The centre provides good quality information and guidance documents in its main reception area and throughout the centre. Its website provides basic information about the services but is not reflective of the good-quality information available in the centre. Effective links are being established with Jobcentre Plus and users are being supported to improve both their personal and educational development. The

centre's current educational plan lacks clear opportunities for users to develop their skills in working towards accredited courses that will improve their access to further training and employability.

Senior leaders and centre staff encourage regular feedback from centre users through discussions and written evaluations, and this helps the centre to identify needs and to tailor activities accordingly, although this is not systematic and lacks longer-term planning. Users are also encouraged to provide suggestions through the suggestions box, and these are all considered by staff and a written response is displayed within the centre.

Accommodation is of a good standard and well maintained. The centre makes good use of limited space. For example, the moving wall in the outreach centre allows the spaces to be divided up to offer privacy from the main reception.

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	3
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	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The local authority provides targets for the centre but these are on a borough-wide basis and not specifically tailored to the centre. The advisory group provides the centre with support and challenge. It is beginning to look in more detail at the centre's self-evaluation, and to challenge the staff more and to set targets for them.

The Family Forum meets regularly, and any suggestions or ideas are discussed with the centre manager and shared with the advisory group, if necessary.

The centre's leaders work well as a team and have built purposeful links with users, other agencies and providers which they use effectively to provide services that are of good quality and well matched to users' needs. Users are seen as individuals and individual packages of support are offered.

Staff and volunteers have a comprehensive induction when they join the centre. Staff undertake relevant training to enable them to support families effectively and keep them safe. All policies and procedures are clear and meet requirements, and some policies have been adopted in their entirety across a number of organisations to

ensure greater consistency. Safeguarding is a particular strength with clearly defined and robust procedures. Robust recruitment procedures, including Criminal Records Bureau check, are completed on all staff employed directly by the centre. The centre also checks the recruitment procedures of staff who work at the centre but are not directly employed by them, to ensure that they undertake the necessary checks. Child-protection procedures are thorough and responsibilities are clear. Staff attend regular training on safeguarding. The Family Involvement Worker is integral to the outreach service and links effectively with partner agencies.

The centre has a strong commitment to inclusion and removing barriers. All groups within the community are positively promoted in the centre. 'Stay and Play Plus' is specifically targeted at parents and carers with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to support them with their specific needs, although they can access all 'Stay and Play' groups.

Leaders have a clear idea about the impact of specific actions and improvement over time on users of the centre. However, data to demonstrate the overall effectiveness of the centre are not yet fully developed. The action plan, which links to the local authority's strategic targets, lacks specific criteria by which to measure the centre's success. The centre is collecting a wide range of data and this is developing. There is evidence to show the good impact of the centre's work on improving outcomes for individuals and the centre is considering how this information can be recorded to reflect the good work that they do.

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	3
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	3
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	3

community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	
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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Vista Field Children’s Centre on 6 and 7 October 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

The centre, which is based in two buildings, within close proximity, provides you and your children with a modern, attractive, safe environment where you feel well cared for and valued. Drop-in groups, such as ‘Stay and Play’, are offered at the centre’s buildings and at other venues within the local community. The centre provides you with a wide range of information and makes every effort to contact others who have not accessed the centre to inform them about the services it provides and the support it can offer.

The centre staff know the community well and are committed to supporting both your children’s development and your own skills. They work hard to build good relationships with you by developing your confidence so that you feel better equipped to support your families. You benefit from the range of courses available and value the opportunities to develop your skills in typing, providing nutrition on a budget, helping your children to learn and first aid.

The centre leaders work well together to make sure that the centre is well organised. They often ask for your views, feedback and ideas to help you decide how they can help you more.

The centre’s self-evaluation covers all areas but does not clearly show how successful the centre is in developing its service and measuring the impact that this has on users of the centre. The centre needs to develop systems to obtain data so that they can measure how well they are doing.

Vista Field Children’s Centre is a safe place for you to meet other parents and carers and people who can help you. Staff build up trusting relationships with users and there is mutual respect for each other. All families are welcomed and helped to attend a good range of well-advertised sessions, for example by the provision of a crèche. The centre works closely with other community resources to provide support such as the summer play-scheme and summer outings.

The Family Forum provides a good opportunity for you to have a voice in how the centre is run and provides a good link with the centre manager. The advisory group

also includes some of you to ensure that the centre continues to meet the needs of the community.

Centre staff look at ways of providing interesting activities and courses that will have the most benefit for you. They listen to your views about what courses would be of most benefit. The local authority and the centre advisory board do not always set challenging targets for staff to help make the centre an even better one.

The centre provides your children and yourselves with an attractive, safe environment where you and your children feel well cared for and valued. You told inspectors that the centre is making a big difference to your lives and that you enjoy attending the good range of activities on offer.

Those of you who need it are given support and information with difficulties you may be having such as with housing or managing your finances.

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