

# Inspection report for Abbey Children's Centre

Local authority	Barking and Dagenham
Inspection number	362418
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Kath Beck

Centre governance	London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
Centre leader	Jill Gallagher
Date of previous inspection	n/a
Centre address	North Street
	Barking
	IG11 8JA
Telephone number	020 8724 1262
Fax number	020 8724 1263
Email address	abbeychildrenscentre@lbdd.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	n/a
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY 297566 Abbey Children's Centre Nursery

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.

## 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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 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 two additional inspectors. The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, senior leadership team, front-line staff, the local authority, representatives from the range of services offered, parents and carers who are on the advisory board and a local headteacher. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Abbey Children's Centre is situated in Abbey Ward in the west of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham on the Hart's Lane Estate. It opened in 2004 as part of a local Sure Start programme. Arrangements for the governance of the centre include the local authority, the Locality Partnership Group, which is an advisory body to all Children's Centres in Barking and Dagenham, and the Children's Centre Community Forum. The Forum is a specific advisory board, with parental representation, for Abbey Children's Centre. The centre provides the full core offer including childcare, family support, child and family health services and Jobcentre Plus. Abbey Ward is within the 10% most deprived areas in the country. Its population has grown by one fifth in the last eight years. The large majority of families come from diverse minority ethnic groups. Almost half are of Asian heritage while one quarter of the families are of Black heritage. The area has a mix of housing types that include medium-and high-rise flats. Unemployment rates and the number of families on benefits are higher than the national average. The Nursery admits children from the age of three months. Initial assessments indicate that development when they first start in the Nursery is lower than usually found. A privately run breakfast, after-school and holiday club operates from the Annexe in Queens Road, Barking. Abbey Children's Centre works in cooperation with Gascoigne Children's Centre nearby to provide services that complement each other and to share resources and staff. This centre 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

1

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

## Main findings

Abbey Children's Centre offers outstanding support to families and young children. Its atmosphere is warm, welcoming and calm, but has a buzz of purposeful activity. The view, shared by all who are connected with the Abbey, that the needs of each individual child and their family are of the highest importance, underpins the high-quality care, guidance and support it provides. Users are empowered to improve their individual and family circumstances and make a real difference to their lives. Equality and diversity are promoted strongly. Safeguarding of all users in their day-to-day lives, while in the centre, at home or working in the community, is at the heart of its work. Users and parents and carers appreciate the work of the centre fully. It is highly regarded and plays a central role within the community. Among many comments praising its work was, 'I have never been part of a children's centre as friendly, welcoming, vibrant and exciting as Abbey.' Information from case studies shows that families, especially in times of difficulty, have received very good support from a wide range of services within, or coordinated by, the centre. The number of users accessing this high-quality support has increased rapidly in the past three years as more families attend the centre. This is due in part to the very effective partnership with the outreach workers, and with colleagues from health who ensure families are registered with the centre at any time, but particularly soon after a child is born.

Leadership and management are strong because of the very clear communication systems among the staff and between the centre, the local authority, a range of services, health providers and other children's centres. These communications allow flexibility of provision that matches precisely the needs of users and make it easy to access data that drives developments and monitors the centre's performance. Leaders and managers have high expectations for users and for the wider community. For example, volunteers have clear personal development plans that enable them to develop skills and gain employment with the assistance of Jobcentre Plus. Parenting courses and a range of provision to enhance family relationships and

children's play and communication skills from birth have high levels of attendance. In addition, a project that included the Nursery, 'Every Child a Talker', has been successful in significantly raising the number of children who reach the national average in communication, language and literacy by the age of five. Courses to promote healthy eating have also proved successful as the number of children in the area known to be obese has reduced. The recent inspection of the Nursery found that children who attend make rapid gains in all areas of learning because the provision is outstanding. These factors, along with robust self-evaluation procedures that take into account national and local indicators, demonstrate an outstanding capacity to improve.

The partnership with parents and carers is valued highly. Their views are respected and acted on. For example, arrangements for parenting and play and communication sessions have been altered to ensure working parents and carers can attend. The arrangements for governance of the centre have been changed recently to ensure more opportunities for parents and carers to play a key role, along with other partners, in challenging the centre's performance. Parents and carers are keen to fulfil their responsibilities well when attending the newly convened Children's Centre Community Forum. Training to help them to do this effectively, and understand fully the overall management arrangements of the centre and others in the locality, is incomplete. Opportunities for parents and carers to contribute the views of the Forum to the Locality Partnership Group have not been clearly established as the system is very new.

The centre has been very successful in extending its provision through partnerships with schools. It enhances their provision with regard to sex education, the prevention of teenage pregnancy and skills in dealing with bullying. The Nursery is used as a model of excellence to enhance practice in schools within the local authority and to benefit young children on a wider scale.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Enable parents and carers' representatives to complete their training so that they can carry out their roles on the Children's Centre Community Forum effectively and contribute to the Locality Partnership Group.

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

<b>1</b>
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The centre provides many excellent opportunities to promote healthy lifestyles and support the mental, physical and emotional well-being of its users. It works closely with agencies such as MENCAP to ensure its provision meets the needs of those with mental health difficulties. A high number of parents and carers attend the child health and antenatal clinics, as well as antenatal parent craft classes. In the past

year, over 880 parents and carers have attended play and communication groups, which focus on speech and language development and parents' and carers' interaction with their child. Excellent breastfeeding and weaning support and health training are supporting families in helping young children make a healthy start in life. Following a course in healthy eating, one parent wrote, 'My family is now living a healthier life since I have been on the course.' The Nursery inspection found that children have very good opportunities for physical activity. Parents and carers attend keep-fit classes at the centre. Courses about life choices for secondary school pupils led to a number of participants taking up screening for sexually transmitted diseases. One student wrote, 'I really enjoyed this programme, it has opened my knowledge of sexual health.'

All staff at the centre, outreach workers and health and school partners see the safety and well-being of users and their families as a key priority. The centre knows its families and the locality well. Early identification of concerns and intervention by the centre's family support team, along with other agencies, play an important part in the reduction of harm to children. Information from case studies about children who are subject to a child protection plan illustrates that, as a result of support through the centre, children's safety is enhanced. The Common Assessment Framework is used effectively when specialist intervention is required, including support for teenage parents. Almost all parents and carers, especially those receiving specialist assistance through the centre, express high levels of satisfaction with the service they have received.

The Nursery inspector found that children in the Nursery really enjoy their learning. As a result of the project to promote talking, all children who attend can communicate effectively through speech, pictures or sign language. As a result, many are ahead of other children of their age in listening and understanding, their use of expressive language, and their social skills. Parents and carers learn specific strategies to enable the development of their child's speech and communication skills in play and communication sessions. Feedback from these sessions in the centre, in parents' and carers' homes or at the 'Shining Stars' groups for pupils with special educational needs confirms that in six weeks, children made progress from using only gestures to communicating in three- or four-word sentences.

Children, young people and parents and carers make important contributions to decision making in the centre. Nursery children are involved in evaluating their lunchtime food from a new provider. Young people aged from 13 to 19 act as 'Young Inspectors' and have inspected the centre, bringing about changes, such as easy access to water for visitors and a notice board for users to record their views. Parents and carers are fully involved in sharing ideas for improvement and arranging events to raise money and celebrate the inclusivity of the community. Some run groups to develop parenting skills and act as volunteers. As a result of the 'You said, we did' initiative, activities are now organised during half-term breaks, bringing more children to the centre. In addition, more adult learning courses are provided, a 'stitch and sew' group is due to start soon and the garden has been planted to make it

more attractive. Users' understanding of governance and their contribution to the overall decision-making processes are at an early stage of development.

The centre is very welcoming. Visitors and users comment in their evaluations about the way they feel 'nurtured'. Children behave very well as there is always something captivating for them to do, whether attending the Nursery, visiting with their parents and carers or attending a session such as 'messy play'. Skills that will stand them in good stead for the future are developed through the wide range of provision the centre offers. A key priority for this year is to reduce the amount of worklessness in the area. Volunteers have development plans to help them into employment. Jobcentre Plus has enabled an increased number of parents and carers to find work. Advice from the local tax and benefits offices means many families have full access to all the money to which they are entitled. Four childcare apprentices, who are studying for qualifications, are supported by the centre. Close links with colleges and other children's centres are enabling parents and carers and staff to access accredited courses.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>1</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>1</b>

## **How good is the provision?**

**1**

Robust assessment procedures enable the centre to make high-quality provision for users' welfare, health and social needs. These are carried out by the senior leadership team, through the local authority's service review and family support and partner services, based at the centre or at another nearby. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation, taking into account comments made by users about the services, ensures that where needs are not being met, services are changed and tailored to meet requirements. Through its own evaluation, the centre has been targeting, successfully, families who are harder to reach within the White British community, so the number using the centre is increasing. Few fathers were taking the opportunity

to use the centre. Determined action has changed this picture and many more are using the centre. More facilities are available at the weekend and courses run in the evening to enhance parenting skills. One father wrote in his evaluation, 'The centre is very welcoming, very informative. You've made me an excited dad to be very comfortable with what to expect as a parent.' The Nursery inspection found that an excellent system to track children's progress is used to ensure that provision is adapted to meet the children's needs.

Staff, including family support, are using the Common Assessment Framework very effectively to ensure assessments of the challenges faced by families or individuals are well informed. Consequently, the support is personalised to meet each family's individual needs. Close partnerships with multi-agency teams are enhancing safeguarding for young people. In their feedback to the centre, parents and carers are clear that provision is making a real difference to their lives.

The centre celebrates achievement through award ceremonies for those completing courses and for sustained attendance at meetings, personal encouragement and displays. Free Nursery education and crèche facilities have opened up training and development opportunities for users. Users improve their educational and personal development through a modern apprenticeship programme, the centre's engagement with teenage parents, including a home-access project, courses to develop skills in speaking English, development plans for volunteers and links with Jobcentre Plus and local colleges. One teenager wrote, 'Us young people love the support you give.' Successes include volunteers who have gained qualifications and become teaching assistants in schools.

The centre provides a full range of services to meet the core offer and adapts them to meet the changing needs of the community. The centre is successful in engaging families, lone parents and carers, teenage parents and pregnant teenagers across the community. Outreach workers ensure programmes are available for adults or children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Programmes and services are coordinated across a number of centres so that parents and carers can access them at a time that suits them best. The centre takes its services into schools to enhance the curriculum and children's personal and social development. In turn, schools refer families to the centre if they have concerns about them. The impact of provision is monitored carefully by the centre and it is clear about the impact of its provision in the short and longer term. It tracks and keeps in touch with many families. Case studies, reviews of courses, the centre's 'Your Wall' where users post their comments, and thorough analysis of data give a very good picture about the high-quality, improved outcomes for families and children.

The quality of care for young children is excellent throughout all the activities they attend. Attendance at many of the health clinics is high as the centre is at the heart of the community. Visits to the baby-weighting clinic give parents and carers the opportunity to seek advice from health staff, including a health visitor. The centre is part of a community oral health campaign and offers sexual health and contraceptive advice to teenagers, as well as screening for sexually-transmitted diseases. General

and specific personal advice is provided to reduce smoking and the amount of alcohol and drug abuse. Families finding themselves in crisis are confident to ask for family support and referral to appropriate services. Job brokers in the centre provide advice about attending interviews and writing a CV to help people return to work.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>1</b>

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

<b>1</b>
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New arrangements for governance and accountability are understood very well by senior leaders and managers. Very strong links between the local authority, the overall advisory body and senior leaders mean that ambitions for the development of the centre are high. These strong links enhance long-term strategic planning, especially in relation to sustainability, development plans and service provision. Members of the senior leadership team also lead different aspects of provision, such as family support across the local authority. This ensures effective collaborative working and monitoring of integrated provision. The newly established Children's Centre Community Forum has been formed to enable parents and carers to take a more effective role in the governance and to challenge staff and elected members about all aspects of the centre.

Morale in the centre is high. Staff are enthusiastic and determined to do their best for the community. Relationships are strong. Day-to-day management arrangements work very well as all staff take responsibility for the smooth running of the centre. They know they are accountable for their roles through appraisal and the way they bring about high-quality outcomes for users. Safeguarding procedures are robust. Local authority procedures and guidance for safe recruitment are followed closely. All staff have been subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check and are trained appropriately in child-protection procedures. They work in partnership effectively with a range of agencies to protect children and vulnerable adults. In addition, staff enable users to access services, such as support for domestic violence, from other centres.

Users' views, rigorous evaluation of services by the centre, its partners and local authority, and detailed collection and analysis of data influence provision. They enable the centre to decide key priorities for development in the locality. The progress of ambitious targets for improvement, for example a reduction in the number of children who are obese and worklessness rates, is monitored carefully. In



the past three years, the centre has extended its provision, reach and volume significantly. Resources are used and managed very efficiently to benefit the community. Rooms are multi-purpose, enabling flexible use of the building, and easily accessible to those with disabilities. The centre fulfils all its statutory duties and provides excellent value for money.

The inclusion of all children and their families is promoted very effectively and discrimination tackled rigorously. Outreach services in local schools and health centres enable the centre to engage with groups who do not traditionally attend Abbey. The use of Makaton, picture cues, language courses, such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), and translations by multilingual staff enable all users to communicate effectively. Local events, such as a St George's Day celebration, enable the wider community to understand and take up services within the centre.

*These are the grades for leadership and management<*

<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>1</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>1</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>1</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>1</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>1</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>1</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>1</b>

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

The inspection report for EY 297566 Abbey Children's Centre Nursery. The setting was inspected during the same week that the inspection of the Children's Centre took place. The Nursery was found to be outstanding.

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 the Abbey Children's Centre on 6–7 October 2010. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Thank you for your help and contribution to the inspection. Those of you we spoke to told us that you could not thank the centre enough for the support you had received and the difference it had made to your lives. We read your comments on 'Your wall' and in the many evaluations and comments about the courses you have attended and services that you use. We agree that Abbey provides you with high-quality care, guidance and support because the needs of each individual child and their family are of the highest importance. Family support and the centre's links with many other agencies are giving you the knowledge to overcome difficulties you are experiencing. The health services and courses such as play and communication, healthy eating and English for speakers of other languages are really helping your child to achieve well and be healthy. The centre does a very good job in enabling you to develop ways that help you to improve your parenting skills, ensure your children live healthy lives, or return to employment. It takes great care to ensure that you and your children are safeguarded and that the centre is a safe place to be.

The senior staff, together with the local authority, lead and manage the centre really well. They listen to your views carefully to ensure that the provision meets your needs and that everyone is fully included. They know what the centre needs to do to improve and are keen to help your representatives on the Children's Centre Community Forum carry out their roles as well as they can. The Forum is new and designed to enable parents and carers to challenge the centre to make sure it sustains its high-quality provision. Parents and carers are learning about their role but their training is not complete. This means they do not yet know enough about what they are expected to do or how they can contribute to the Local Partnership Group that oversees all the children's centres in Barking and Dagenham.

The centre values its partnership with you fully and respects your ideas. For example, arrangements for parenting and play and communication sessions have been changed to ensure you can attend at different times of the day. The recent inspection of the Nursery judged it to be outstanding and found that it gives children a really good start to their lives and learning. The quality of Abbey Children's Centre is summed up by a parent who says, 'I have never been part of a children's centre as friendly, welcoming, vibrant and exciting as Abbey.'

We have asked the centre and local authority to:

- enable parents' and carers' representatives to complete their training so that they can carry out their roles on the Children's Centre Community Forum effectively and contribute to the locality partnership group.

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