

# Inspection report for New River Green Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Islington
Inspection number	366543
Inspection dates	1–2 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Nina Bee

Centre governance	Islington Local Authority
Centre leader	Jeff Higgins
Date of previous inspection	Not inspected previously
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	New River Green early years provision

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.

**Published:** March 2011

## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

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

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

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 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 one additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the interim head of the centre, the assistant head, family support workers, the chair of the new advisory board, representatives from the local authority, health professionals and parents. They observed some aspects of the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

New River Green Children's Centre was designated in June 2003 as a phase one centre. It is situated in one of the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. The interim head of centre has been in post for six weeks. Although the local authority has overall responsibility for monitoring the performance of the centre, arrangements for its governance and management have recently been reviewed. An advisory board which consists of parents, partner agencies and representatives from the local community is currently being developed to commence in the summer term 2011. The centre provides the full core offer, including family support, such as advice on training, employability and benefits, child and family health services, outreach and home visiting and childcare. Children who enter the centre's early years provision have skills and development below those expected for their ages.

The centre serves families living in the Canonbury Ward. Approximately a third of families are unemployed and over half of the children live in workless households. Just over half of the families come from White British or other White backgrounds. A wide range of other minority ethnic groups are represented. English is not the first language for approximately a third of families.

## 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

All who use the centre benefit from a range of well-established and organised services. These are carefully tailored to meet the needs of individuals as well as their families. 'Stay and Play' sessions, for example, are very well attended and parents say how much they, and their children, enjoy taking part in these. Parents spoke of how these sessions have enabled them to make good friends with other mums and the staff, as well as learning more about looking after and caring for their children. The assistant head, who has been overseeing this part of the centre's work for a number of years, has played a key role in ensuring the success of these sessions. Weekly meetings with those who work in the centre have enabled her to ensure that the sessions are regularly evaluated, parents' views are sought and provision developed accordingly. Fathers, too, are encouraged to take part in these sessions and also have their own 'Stay and Play' session which they attend with their children. These are held fortnightly on Saturday mornings and are also well attended. Individuals' needs are well catered for in all the centre does for its users. Staff are quick to identify the next step that is required, whether it is personal, social or academic skills. These successes show that the centre, with its happy and cohesive community, has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Safeguarding is suitably prioritised and procedures and policies are satisfactory. Careful checks are made daily to ensure the children are safe both inside and out. The building is well maintained and kept immaculately clean. Parents made very positive comments about this. The care, guidance and support offered to users in the centre and in the wider community are good. The family support workers do an excellent job, both in the centre and out in the local community, helping parents and their families. This is reflected in many comments from parents who explained how the impact of the work of staff has positively affected their lives. Parents of young children spoke extremely appreciatively of the support and encouragement they received during the time they were breast feeding. Others spoke of the 'lifesaving support' they were given when they arrived at the centre depressed after having their babies and not having the confidence to go anywhere. Many parents contributed their views and all had nothing but the highest praise for the support

they received from the centre staff.

The centre is undergoing considerable change in relation to its leadership and management. The interim head of centre rightly identified that the centre's self-evaluation information was out of date and has begun to address this. In addition, he is aware that the centre's development plan does not make sufficiently sharp links between evaluation and the impact of the services the centre offers. The local authority keeps the centre well informed by providing senior staff with useful data about its performance each quarter. Data from the last quarter show that a high number of users come from outside the reach area and from outside Islington. Although the centre is meeting the needs of some targeted groups of users, managers are aware that other groups in its reach area are not sufficiently engaged with the centre. They are taking steps to rectify this. The interim head is aware of the need to use the available data to ensure that all hard-to-reach groups are targeted in the reach area and to show whether there is a trend of improvement over time.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Make more effective use of data about the involvement of different groups of users in the reach area and beyond to monitor the centre's impact, show trends of improvement over time and ensure that all hard-to-reach groups are targeted.
- Improve the clarity of the centre's development plan so that it shows how leaders will evaluate its effectiveness in terms of the impact of the services it provides.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>2</b>
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Parents enjoy using the centre, as seen by the long queue each time there is a 'Stay and Play' session. Many of these parents come from outside the reach area. They say activities are well organised and the staff are helpful and supportive but, best of all, the centre is a clean and hygienic place for their children to play. Whilst outcomes for users are generally good, the centre is not sufficiently engaging some groups in its reach area, for example lone parents and the unemployed.

Children were seen thoroughly enjoying themselves as they munched on fruit during a 'Stay and Play' session. Healthy eating was well promoted. Parents were given plastic bowls of fruit to encourage their children to have a taste in a very relaxed and friendly environment. These young children achieved well. Some babies slept contentedly whilst children were observed learning to play alongside each other and

beginning to understand how to behave in a small group. Older children listened enthusiastically to a story read to them by a family support worker. Listening and the love of books were expertly focused on and the session was enjoyed by both parents and their children. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who attend extra boost 'Stay and Play' sessions receive good quality individual support and make good progress. Individual needs, such as issues related to behaviour, are successfully addressed. Resources, such as the sensory room, add excitement to activities during 'Stay and Play' sessions. The childminders' 'Stay and Play' was well attended and much appreciated by them and by new parents who were looking for childcare for when they return to work. Relationships between all centre staff and families and their children are extremely positive.

A few parents who speak a language other than English are effectively supported as they learn basic English skills. Others who want to gain more literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are suitably supported to develop these basic skills. New mothers spoke positively about how well the centre helps them to develop their parenting skills and learn about issues such as sleep patterns and how to deal with their children's behaviour.

The centre itself is a secure environment for all who use it. Parents have good opportunities to develop a better understanding of safety and make their homes a safer place to be. Staff know the users well. Early identification of concerns and intervention by the family support workers, alongside other agencies, play an important part in making sure that children are kept safe. When specialist intervention is needed, the Common Assessment Framework is used effectively.

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

**How good is the provision?**

**2**

The needs of families and their children are accurately assessed enabling them to be provided with the support and guidance they need. Users have many opportunities to

feed back their opinions and evaluate the provision on offer. Centre staff take good account of users' views. For example, they are aware that some adults are not happy when they cannot get into 'Stay and Play' sessions because the centre cannot always cope with the large numbers that turn up. Senior staff are currently planning ways to accommodate more parents and carers and their families.

Good partnerships with outside agencies, such as health specialists, provide users with good quality support and advice. For example, children who have speech and language difficulties are supported in 'Little Leaps', which provides valuable help for individuals who have difficulty communicating with others. Health specialists and the family support workers give beneficial support to mothers-to-be and those who have just had babies. Both do a successful job in showing parents, carers and childminders how to gain access to further support and advice. The centre has been relatively successful in increasing the number of mothers who take up breast feeding. Parents spoke of how the work of the centre had changed their lives and without it they would not be here. They were adamant that the centre certainly makes a difference in their lives.

Users' individual needs are quickly identified and action taken to help them deal with difficulties their children are having as well as their own concerns and problems. Parents spoke very highly of the outreach work of the family support workers. Many said they did not know what they would have done without it. There are many examples of the expert way they have supported families in crisis. Many parents said that family support workers had supported them through very difficult situations and directed them to specialists for additional support. Outreach services are adapted expertly to meet families' needs.

The centre targets families to become involved in the Fluoride Vanish Programme and gives out packs which promote oral hygiene. Data from the Primary Care Trust show that the centre has been successful in increasing the number of young children in its reach area who have visited the dentist over the last few years.

The centre provides good advice and guidance about opportunities for adult training. Some users have completed courses to prepare them for going back to work. Others have completed courses in areas such as beauty therapy and first aid. A small number undertook a three-day course on developing parenting skills. There are good procedures in place to support families with issues such as claiming benefits, handling money and seeking work.

Courses and activities are generally well attended and users achieve well because of the good quality support they receive. The centre receives up-to-date information from the local authority about the number of children and families in its reach area and how many of these it attracts into the centre. Centre staff do not always use this data rigorously enough to ensure that the good quality services they provide are successfully engaging all the hard-to-reach groups within the area. Nevertheless, the centre has successfully increased the involvement of Bengali and Somali families, initially through 'Cook and Eat' sessions that were specifically planned for them.

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

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

<b>3</b>
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The management and governance of the centre have recently been reviewed, but the new advisory board is not fully in place until next term. The new leadership and management structure is not fully established as a permanent head of centre has not yet been appointed. Nevertheless, the interim head of centre, senior staff, family support workers and other staff and partners who work in the centre are skilled and committed to improving outcomes for children and their families. Day-to-day management is good, which results in all activities running smoothly in a calm and welcoming environment. Centre staff and partners have a clear understanding of policies and procedures. There is evidence of some good-quality evaluation of provision by centre staff and partners, where day-to-day activities are evaluated through weekly meetings. Recent monitoring by the local authority has identified accurately the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. The interim head of centre is aware that the centre's development plan is not linked systematically enough to the identified areas for improvement.

Equality and diversity are actively promoted. Good attention is given to all users, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds. For example, it was identified that Bengali and Somalian groups were under represented and so activities to encourage them to join in were added. Good opportunities are provided for adults who do not speak English as their first language to part take in courses to improve their basic English. Centre staff are aware of the different target groups within their reach area who are not currently using the centre, such as families from workless households and lone parents, and are planning to find ways to meet their particular needs.

Staff have developed good relationships with the many external agencies and partners they work with. Team work is effective and, through careful analysis of the individual needs of families and their children, everyone is well catered for. Consequently, the impact on outcomes for users is generally good. Provision is well focused on individuals with specific needs, such as those with speech and language difficulties or vulnerable children. The centre actively promotes the inclusion of all its users, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Arrangements for safeguarding are secure and careful checks are completed on all who work in the centre. Staff are aware of what to do to ensure that all children are kept safe. Clear documentation, showing which external agencies are involved, is kept on individuals. Risk assessments are satisfactory overall, but risk assessments of some activities and sessions are not rigorous enough.

*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>3</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>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>3</b>

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

An inspection of the early years provision in the centre took place on Monday 28 February. The outcome of the inspection was used to inform the judgements made during the inspection.

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 New River Green Children's Centre on 1 and 2 March 2011 and we would like to thank you for the help you gave to us during the inspection. We enjoyed talking with you and hearing your positive comments about the work of the centre.

We judged the centre to be satisfactory overall, but we think that the services the centre provides for you and your children are good and that this enables all of you who use the centre to achieve well in all you do there. As part of the inspection we looked at the centre's plans and documents. We also spoke with centre staff and many other people who work with you. It was lovely to see so many of you having great fun at a 'Stay and Play' session with your babies and toddlers. It was also nice to see so many of your children enjoying eating fruit as they listened to the story.

We heard from lots of you about the courses and sessions you have taken part in and how much they have benefited you. Many of you told us that the family support workers do a really good job and have helped you when you have had difficulties by showing you where you can go to receive extra support and advice. We agree with you they support you very well indeed.

You are all well cared for and looked after whilst you are in the centre. The outreach family workers also support you extremely well when they come and visit you at home. Many of you told us how helpful they were when you had your babies and were trying to breast feed. Others of you spoke about how helpful they were when you had difficulties with your children and needed additional support. I know that a few of you have done courses to enable you to develop skills so that you can try and find employment. Others have had help in learning to develop basic English skills.

Although the day-to-day management of the centre runs smoothly and efficiently, the overall leadership and management of the centre are currently satisfactory and have been under review. We have asked the centre staff to make two main improvements. Firstly, to make sure that they evaluate the work they do more carefully so that they can accurately identify what needs to be improved and how successfully they are reaching their goals. Secondly, we have asked them to analyse the information they receive from the local authority more carefully and check that they are doing all they can to engage the hard-to-reach groups in the local area.

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