

Inspection report for Grassroots Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Newham
Inspection number	366475
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Paul Armitage

Centre governance	London Borough of Newham
Centre leader	Dawn Wilson
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Foundations For Learning

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, 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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with users, centre staff, the chair of the advisory board, a representative of the local authority and professionals working across centres in the borough. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Grassroots Children's Centre is located in the west of Newham serving parts of the Canning Town and Custom House wards. It opened as a phase one centre in 2007 and achieved full core status in 2009. All activities are based at the centre, although outreach, home support and other professionals work in various locations, including users' homes. The centre is based in an environmentally friendly, award winning building in Memorial Park. It shares the building with a number of tenants. The centre is open Monday to Saturday from 8am until 6pm.

The centre serves an area of considerable deprivation. All Newham wards are in the 10% and 20% most deprived Super Output Areas in England. The wards served by the centre rank as the most deprived in Newham. Seven per cent of the population are in receipt of benefits. Unemployment is approximately 8%. Fifteen per cent of families consist of lone parents with dependent children and 12% are families with married couples and dependents. Teen pregnancies represent 6% of all births.

The reach area is ethnically diverse. Current data for children under five show the largest group to be of African heritage, followed closely by White British, eastern European and Bangladeshi. Children's ability levels on entry to early years provision are in line with what is expected nationally.

The centre is governed by the London Borough of Newham’s Early Childhood Services. There is a centre manager. The advisory board consists of two service users, one community representative, two external providers, one childminder, one staff manager and the area manager for the Foundations for Learning nursery.

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

Grassroots provides an outstanding service for its users. Through the work of its well-qualified staff, it is helping users become healthier, safer, more knowledgeable and skilful.

Children are given a first-rate grounding in basic skills and they respond very well to the opportunities provided to work and play together. Their behaviour is excellent and achievement is high. Adults make outstanding use of the wide range of activities and outcomes are high. These services extend from those linked very closely to pregnancy and bringing up children to those aimed at helping with improving education, understanding and obtaining benefits, and finding work. The centre runs a number of successful initiatives that are helping to promote healthy lifestyles. It has taken steps to improve children’s immunisation rates in the reach area, however, these remain below average. Safeguarding arrangements for children and adults are rigorous and effective. Excellent security procedures ensure the safety of all users.

Much of the success of the centre is due to the staff’s excellent understanding of the needs of people in the reach area and its success in making contact with vulnerable families. Staff are very much helped by excellent data provided by the local authority, including the CareFirst database into which all professionals input their activities with users. The regular detailed discussions in ‘Every Child Matters’ (ECM) meetings and in ‘Family Meetings’ ensure the successful, joined-up consideration of the complex problems often experienced by centre users. Support for users with special educational needs and/or disabilities is outstanding.

Management of the centre is outstanding. The collaboration between the senior management of the centre and the local authority is impressive. It ensures that centre staff are well informed of changing needs. Challenging targets are set and met and very thorough self-evaluation leads to improvements which are set out clearly in a well-constructed development plan. The centre has strong links with different agencies, whose performance is regularly evaluated against clearly stated expectations. As a result of this high quality self-evaluation, the centre's use of its resources is outstanding. The high quality of all aspects of management means that the centre has outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

There is a strong commitment to the celebration of diversity, and respect for each other is a strong feature both amongst children and adults. This is clearly evident in sessions such as 'Messy Play' when the mix of people getting on very well together is impressive.

The contribution of users to the management of the centre is good. Two users are now on the effective advisory board and one is chair. Users are always asked their opinions on the courses offered and these opinions are carefully analysed with the results often implemented. However, a few users are unsure about how to communicate their ideas and opinions and say they would like to know even more about the centre and the issues it faces. The centre has plans to introduce a users' forum but this is not yet in place.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work closely with health professionals to improve children's immunisation rates to at least the national average.
- Provide additional opportunities for users to understand more about the centre and to express their views, for example by establishing the users' forum.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Overall, users are developing good, healthy lifestyles. Services to support mothers, both before and after birth, are outstanding. As a result, the percentage of mothers breastfeeding at birth and at six months considerably exceeds the national average. Users comment very positively on the support they receive from midwives, outreach and family support staff, and antenatal classes are over-subscribed. Users say that sessions such as the 'Mums and Bumps' drop-in provide good opportunities for them to discuss all aspects of pregnancy in a sensitive, non-pressurised way. Another success is the relatively low percentage of expectant mothers who smoke. The centre's successful smoking cessation classes have contributed significantly to this.

Less positive, however, are immunisation rates in the reach area, where only 82% of children aged one have had all their relevant immunisations compared to a national

average of 93%. Obesity rates for children in Reception in the reach area exceed the national average by over 3%. The centre is making considerable efforts to improve users' understanding about nutrition and, through this, obesity. 'Dump the Dummy' and 'Bin the Bottle' are aimed at establishing healthy eating patterns as well as dealing with oral health and potential speech and language problems. Outcomes from these courses have been good. However, the centre has not yet found a successful way of working with partners to deal with the immunisation issue.

In the wider community, safety is assured by the effective coordination of professionals' knowledge and understanding about vulnerable families in multi-agency meetings. These meetings are very well supported by the centre's access to local authority data which records the problems of vulnerable families and professionals' responses to them. Case studies illustrate well the complexity of issues facing families and the often positive outcomes. One records, 'A year on, the parent is working and she is much happier. The child is achieving well at nursery.' Child protection plans are monitored carefully. There are currently no users subject to the Common Assessment Framework processes, in large part due to effective partnership working. However, appropriate arrangements exist to use the Framework when necessary.

In the centre, the enjoyment of children, and their ability to achieve, behave well and to develop relationships are outstanding. They are building a solid foundation for their future lives. In 'Messy Play', for instance, they respond well to the good range of indoor and outdoor activities which encourage imagination, creativity, cooperation and independence. In the toy library, a mother said that she was 'very pleased with the range of toys on offer and the challenges they offer to my children'. She was pleased that her older child had to find out how to use them. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive outstanding care with many making substantial progress. Two elements are especially effective: first, children's rapid access to specialist staff and follow-up and, second, close cooperation with their families.

Users' contributions to decision making are good. The role of representatives on the advisory board has been significant and centre users are always asked for their opinion of courses and other activities. The centre has plans to introduce a users' forum to provide even more opportunities to contribute.

Users have responded very well to opportunities to improve their economic standing. Excellent uptake of the nursery education grant scheme has resulted in parents and carers having time to take up training or courses to help improve their confidence and employability. Users take advantage of the highly valued sessions and one-to-one support provided by the centre's childcare and employment adviser. These include discovering skills and ambitions, workshops for curriculum vitae writing and making applications, and interview training. There are good links with Jobcentre Plus and Workplace. Teenage parents are signposted to Connexions and there is good evidence to show this is successful. Users find the help offered to access the Citizens Advice Bureau and housing services very beneficial. There are strong, successful links with Newham College; adults from the centre use this facility to undertake

further learning which often leads to employment. Childminders have much appreciated their recent, innovative course held at the centre.

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	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
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	1

How good is the provision?

1

Assessment of the needs of children and their families is outstanding. In addition to professionals' understanding of the reach area, leaders make excellent use of local data, such as the number of children under five whose families are dependent on benefits, to create provision. All professionals working with vulnerable families input their actions and results into the database so that it is kept constantly up-to-date. The centre is in touch with a very substantial percentage of children under five who are potentially vulnerable. A good, recent innovation has been the introduction of 'Family Meetings' when professionals talk about things they have noticed about individual children and which may require a lower level of intervention than the formal multi-agency meetings. This is proving successful for families and staff and leads to efficient resource allocation.

The centre promotes purposeful learning for all users. It is clear in sessions for adults that users listen and contribute, and that those leading the sessions adopt the right teaching strategies to maximise outcomes. This includes sensitivity to the different cultural backgrounds represented. The centre is strongly inclusive and respect for each other is a very significant feature. Another is the way in which it addresses isolation. Many mothers spoke of their relief at finding someone else to talk to and to form friendships. There is often laughter indicating enjoyment despite the seriousness of the issues being considered. The centre is very active in developing the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning; for example, by the provision of targeted work with boys to improve their communication skills.

The wide variety of activities on offer meets users' different needs exceptionally well and includes 'English for Communication' classes, 'Messy Play' sessions for young

children and their families, and events such as the childminder group, a nutrition drop-in session and advice on parenting skills. The 'Talking Together' sessions provided by speech and language specialists help parents and carers to improve their children's ability to communicate. There is also fun such as on 'Sports Fun Day'. This is an example of an activity that resulted from consultation with users. Health visitors provide a wide range of services, and helpful one-to-one appointments are offered for users to seek advice on employment, training, benefits and housing.

Despite this rich offering, the centre is not complacent. Its development plan reflects an accurate assessment of the reach's changing needs. One example of this is the effort that the centre is making to attract fathers. There is already successful provision on Saturdays and on 'Dadi Day' but the centre rightly realises it needs to do more. Two other examples are the introduction of the 'Little Movers' and 'Toddler Gym' to fill identified gaps in physical development and 'Little Green Fingers' to improve families' understanding of food. The centre engages the wider community by developing new services to reflect users' needs, such as the 'Healthy Lifestyles Project' in response to the Mayor's initiative and support for smoking cessation following suggestions from health professionals.

There is a strong commitment amongst staff to do their best for all users and to help them achieve and be safe. High-quality care for young children and their parents and carers includes initiatives such as 'Triple P' which draws on support across many services to promote positive parenting.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Day-to-day management and administration are outstanding; managers rightly point to the contribution made to this by the excellent communication amongst staff and supporting agencies.

Governance arrangements are exceptionally clear and effective. The advisory board's already good oversight is developing well. Minutes of meetings and discussion with the chair indicate careful and critical review of the centre's performance. The work of the centre manager in collaboration with the local authority's head of service is outstanding. Their work provides not only intelligence about the reach area but

ensures, through the regular review process, that targets are addressed and that results are properly monitored with a view to improvement and new provision. The performance of staff is regularly assessed, as is that of agencies linked by contract or service level agreements which set clear, challenging expectations. There is a strong inclusive ethos aimed at encouraging all users to do well.

Challenging targets play a key role in matching provision to desired outcomes. Staff are very conscious of the targets yet ultimately it is their professionalism that sets expectations. As a result, all targets are met. The staff's ambition is well illustrated by the high take-up of opportunities for continuing professional development.

All resources are clearly identified and targeted very effectively at areas of priority so that the centre provides outstanding value for money. Quarterly budget meetings carefully monitor expenditure and adjust both programming and resource allocation to achieve maximum efficiency. For example, the speech and language service has set the 'Chatterbox' drop-in date to make it as accessible as possible to all and to minimise delays in waiting to seek advice from a professional. Likewise, the nutritionist has combined the 'Weaning Parties' for babies under six months with the 'Weaning Next Steps' for those aged from six to 12 months to conserve resources and enable users to obtain information for both stages in one visit. One practical result has been fewer missed appointments. Centre managers regularly analyse the local authority's database, focusing, for example, on race, gender and disability, to identify trends that may influence future provision.

In addition to the already rigorous systems for self-evaluation, the centre is now developing a system of evaluating the long-term (three years plus) impact of provision on the outcomes for users. The aim is to identify any trends relating to the changes in the community and consider the implications for provision and expected outcomes.

Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. Staff have been Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checked and there is a rigorous signing-in procedure on arrival at the centre. Appropriate staff records are kept. In the wider community, the outstanding work of all staff, including the outreach and home support professionals, contributes significantly to identifying children and families who are at risk and helping them to be safe.

The centre works exceptionally well in partnership with other agencies, such as the child and family consultation team, the early childhood services nutrition team, the health visiting team and the pre-school learning alliance trust. The arrangements are reviewed on a regular basis and are highly successful in the way in which they contribute to the provision of integrated services. The health visiting team plays a huge part in the centre's role in addressing the needs of the vulnerable. All these agencies and others regularly contribute their informed views, which have considerable impact on provision.

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	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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	1

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

None

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. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Grassroots Children's Centre on 9–10 March 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We had the opportunity to speak to many of you and we would like to thank you for your comments and ideas. They were very useful to us in reaching our judgements.

We think that Grassroots gives you and your children outstanding opportunities to learn and understand things better. It gives you the opportunity to meet with other adults and for your children to play and explore things together. You come from very different backgrounds and it was excellent to see the way you all got on well together. We are particularly pleased that some of you who previously felt isolated now no longer feel that way. We were also very pleased when you said how the services provided by the centre really help you.

We think the range of services provided is impressive – from the support you receive during pregnancy and with bringing up your children, to opportunities for training, and help with accessing benefits and finding work. We think the work you are doing with the centre to understand more about healthy eating and obesity is particularly important. It is also nice to see that you also have a lot of fun at the centre.

The centre is led and managed exceptionally well. The arrangements for keeping you and your children safe are excellent. All the staff are security checked and we are pleased to see that there are rigorous signing-in and signing-out procedures so that everyone knows who is in the centre at any time.

Although the centre is outstanding, there are still areas where it can do better, so we have set these as development points. First, we have asked the centre to provide more ways for you to understand how it works and the issues it faces, and more opportunities for you to express your opinions. We are pleased that two of you are members of the advisory board but we still think you need more opportunities, such as a users' forum. Second, immunisation rates in your area are below average so we have asked the centre to work with the relevant local bodies to make sure that more of your children are immunised against diseases such as measles.

Once again, thank you for helping us with the inspection, and we give you our best wishes for the future.

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