

# Inspection report for Gloucester Nursery School and Children's Centre

Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	365783
Inspection dates	29–30 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Martyn Groucutt

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Julia Mann
Date of previous inspection	28 January 2008
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Linked school if applicable	Gloucester Nursery School
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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.

An inspection of the maintained nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. 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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with staff and senior managers from the centre, a representative of the governing body, parents and children, local authority representatives and service providers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

The children's centre first opened in September 2007 on the same site as the nursery. It is a phase two centre that provides the full core offer of services. It has a centre leader, who is also the headteacher of the nursery, and a children's centre coordinator, who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre. Governance is undertaken by the governing body of the nursery. The children's centre operates at five other sites in the reach area, which includes a densely populated area of south Northampton where health service statistics show that numbers of births have increased year on year. The reach area covers the 30% most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the town, with around 25% of the children living in poverty. A high number are in single-parent families, characterised by low incomes and workless households in receipt of benefits. There are high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. In some parts of the reach area there is considerable social mobility, and steadily increasing numbers of families are from minority ethnic communities. These include a large Somali group and a growing Polish community. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage at the expected levels for their age.

## 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**

**1**

## Main findings

The overall effectiveness of the centre is good. It offers good support to children and families and there is unanimous agreement among parents and carers that it is an extremely welcoming place that listens carefully to its users. They very much appreciate that staff know them so well and always greet them on first-name terms. The quality of provision for children is a particular strength. Staff have good training, knowledge and understanding of safeguarding issues and inter-agency working in this area is effective.

Outcomes are generally good for users, including those who are vulnerable due to their circumstances and those who are hard to reach. Children enjoy and achieve exceptionally well because they make outstanding progress from their starting points. Economic and social well-being are currently satisfactory. This is because opportunities are limited for users to help them gain accredited qualifications to support a return to employment. Services are mainly matched well to the needs of users because they are widely consulted. Detailed case studies and discussions with users confirm the positive influence that the centre has had on individuals and families. Some strong partnerships, such as that with the Community Law service which has provided excellent financial advice, have helped to change lives for the better. Despite the positive efforts of centre staff, links with Jobcentre Plus and some elements of the Primary Care Trust are limited.

The centre is successful in gaining the views of users. Leaders constantly seek users' reactions, but at the moment this is in a largely informal way since there is no user forum or discrete advisory board. The extremely high returns from users' satisfaction questionnaires and surveys are used effectively by the leadership, and detailed evaluation creates an effective match of provision to expressed needs. For example, the successful 'Dolly Allsorts' crafts group was started after a request from a primarily Somali group of women. However, the centre needs to further develop its methods of identifying the needs of the expanding minority ethnic communities in the reach area and little material is currently available in their home languages, although this is growing. Equality and diversity are promoted and celebrated in an outstanding way and there is a positive emphasis on promoting community cohesion.

Increasingly effective efforts are made to engage hard-to-reach groups and families who are made vulnerable by their circumstances. Provision is targeted specifically at these groups, such as the 'Eat Well, Be Well' group promoting healthy lifestyles. Because data specific to the centre is analysed carefully and published, it is able to show that ambitious targets are met and provision is effectively targeted.

Thorough and effective performance management and professional development systems support the staff well. Service level agreements are reviewed regularly and this helps to hold providers to account. All staff are totally committed to the success of the centre and they form strong empathetic bonds with centre users. This, coupled with inspiring and visionary leadership and clear priorities for the future, gives the centre an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Improve partnerships with key agencies to maximise the involvement of hard-to-reach families and those who are vulnerable due to their circumstances.
- Ensure that the identified needs of the expanding minority ethnic communities in the reach area are understood and addressed through more communication in their home languages.
- Seek to develop a more extensive range of accredited courses that will support adults who wish to return to work.

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

<b>2</b>
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Outcomes are good because the centre works hard to identify and address the wants and needs of most people in the area it serves. The centre's coordinator has started to address the issue around the need to communicate with minority ethnic users with little or no English in their home language. Parents speak highly about ways in which they have been supported, which is also demonstrated in effective individual case studies. Emotional health and well-being are satisfactory, and issues such as domestic violence are dealt with sensitively by staff. For example, users who have faced difficulties at home have blossomed as a result of the centre's help. Users who are vulnerable due to their circumstances are targeted effectively and supported to develop healthy lifestyles in classes such as 'Eat Well, Be Well'. Fathers and male carers feel positively encouraged to become involved in the upbringing of their children through the 'Men's Zone'.

Children make outstanding progress and achieve exceedingly well. They thoroughly enjoy activities, grow in confidence and show excellent collaborative skills. This means that they make rapid progress in speaking and listening and develop an excellent understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles and keep safe. A parent who attends 'Messy Play' with her child said, 'It is helping her to interact with other children and is bringing her out of her shell'.

Similar purposeful learning and positive outcomes are also an effective outcome of adult learning. Those who met the inspectors emphasised how the centre has helped them develop their confidence. For example, people who have been contributors to successful events often started out as centre users. One of the adults learning to speak English said, 'I can speak more in my job, in the shops and with my doctor'. An extremely successful course, run in conjunction with the educational psychologist, 'The Solihull Approach – Understanding Children's Behaviour (Growing Families Together)', supported parents and carers understanding of their children. As one said, 'It totally changed the way I think about why my children are doing certain things'. Another major project has been 'Every Child a Talker' which has brought together parents, childminders and local providers. A measure of its success is that approximately 25% of childminders in the reach area and all local providers have now borrowed equipment such as storybooks to promote children's speaking and listening skills. The behaviour of children is very good and they develop positive relationships. Adult learning is currently not as effective in developing users' economic well-being. For example, opportunities to gain accreditation for learning only currently exist for those learning English. This limits the ability of some adults who wish to return to employment and reflects a lack of links with the local college. The ability of users to formally contribute to decision making processes in the governance of the centre is also limited. Previous attempts to establish a users' forum were not successful and dominated by a small group, so the centre is currently considering alternative ways of formally consulting users.

Users say they feel safe and protected when at the centre or any of the outreach facilities. There are good systems for coordinating support for families who are in vulnerable circumstances, including looked after children. Users benefit from the centre's good use of the Common Assessment Framework and close monitoring of children which means that they receive effective support. When children have detailed child protection plans, great care is taken to ensure that any identified help and support is provided. Parents develop their understanding of health and safety issues which is having a positive impact on improving outcomes for them and their children. For example, new and young parents develop their skills well through parenting programmes and breastfeeding support. Good links with the area's coordinator for special educational needs provide a source of expertise at the regular FAB Friday Group which helps to improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

*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</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>their personal and social development</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>3</b>

## How good is the provision?

<b>2</b>
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The range of services provided at the centre and the five outreach sites creates an effective service that meets the needs of most of the community across the whole of the reach area. The centre is aware that it could be more effective in reaching members of the minority ethnic communities in the area through greater communication in their home languages. The local authority produces a full data report each year and the centre makes effective use of this, supplemented by data collected from other sources, including that from fellow professionals, to analyse its effectiveness. This confirms that the centre is effective and is meeting the large majority of its identified targets effectively. Because the views of users are sought eagerly, albeit at an informal level, the centre is always aware of the needs being expressed and is very effective in meeting them. The centre is looking at ways in which it can better communicate with its non-English-speaking population and has, for example, employed a Somali speaker to work in the crèche and the wider centre. Target groups are identified and efforts are made to establish effective contact in the centre or in family homes. A display of photographs showing the active support now being given by increasing numbers of fathers is mounted in the centre's family room.

The evaluation of users' needs is effective and carried out every six to eight weeks. Effectiveness is reflected in the coordinated support between the centre and a range of professional partners to support ten children with disabilities who currently attend pre-school provision within the reach area. The assessment of the Early Years Foundation Stage profile data shows that over the three years of the centre's existence outcomes have shown good improvement. The overall outcomes are roughly in line with national expectations (despite the poverty indicators in the reach area), but in the areas of PSED and CLL the centre's outcomes at 64% achieving are higher than the local level (54%).

The centre is effective in promoting elements of purposeful learning, development and enjoyment. Its monthly 'Pathfinder' brochure containing details of all the provision at every site is distributed to every home in the reach area. Regular attendance at supermarkets and similar focus points by centre staff seeks to engage as many people as possible directly. Gathering places such as libraries and surgeries all contain a range of centre materials so that provision is widely known and banners and posters in the reach area add to the information provided for potential users. Members of the public are regularly approached for their views by centre staff to try

to ascertain local needs. This community involvement has led to several of its most successful activities being launched, such as 'Dolly Allsorts'. Provision to support family enjoyment or personal development is very effective, illustrated in activities such as 'Stay and Play'. Activities and programmes seek to address identified needs and case studies show that the centre is making a very significant difference to the lives of those with whom it is working. However, provision for accredited learning is not so effective. The centre is currently funding accreditation opportunities for five adults who have been learning English but this is the current limit to accreditation

The commitment of all of the centre's staff to maximise their impact and to engage successfully with centre user's means that the care, guidance and support provided is good. It is an important factor in accounting for the effectiveness of the overall provision. A good range of provision supports initiatives such as the promotion of breastfeeding and the cessation of smoking, with data showing progress in both of these areas. Advice and support relating to alcohol and drug abuse, safety in the home and the reduction of emergency admissions reflects the good practice demonstrated by the centre. Support and guidance in accessing benefits and support are provided by centre workers and case studies provide some striking examples of the ways in which the centre has supported individuals and families through crises.

*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?**

**2**

At the heart of the success of this children's centre is the inspirational leadership of the centre leader. She is very well supported by the centre coordinator and senior leadership team. They are totally committed to excellence and to changing the lives of those with whom they work for the better. This extremely effective leadership is reflected in the unanimous praise they receive from the centre users. Governance is good and has been strengthened by the creation of the committee responsible for 'Performance, Impact, Learning and Services' (PILS). This allows the governing body to also act as the advisory board. The governing body challenges and holds the centre to account, as well as meeting its statutory responsibilities. This is reflected in the outstanding commitment to ensuring the promotion of effective community cohesion and the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and training. Children

with disabilities are well provided for and care is taken to ensure that their needs are met.

The single central register is effectively maintained and shows that all the necessary checks are carried out, including enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks. Risk assessments are detailed and a file carefully maintained to show that they are undertaken with rigour and are reviewed regularly.

Regular, careful evaluation of the centre's activities is undertaken as a matter of course. Ambitious targets are set, based firmly on the data available and seeking year on year improvement. Progress towards them is monitored as a matter of course, analysed and published in the centre's 'Demonstrating Impact and Outcomes for Families'. Not only is the local community consulted closely in identifying its needs, but there is also a very high commitment to the evaluation of what is on offer. The centre knows itself and its community well. Its self-evaluation is of a high calibre and based on objective, data-driven measurement. There are high expectations for users and the wider community. The centre rightly sees itself as a major player in shaping services to meet identifying needs and serving its population so that users can overcome difficulties and maximise their potential.

The outstanding equality of opportunity is reflected in the rapid progress made by children. The centre is full of imagery that celebrates diversity, while its staff work unstintingly to ensure that the needs of vulnerable groups are catered for and that they are engaged in the life of the centre. Users are eager to testify to the effectiveness of provision that enables the centre to achieve the high standards it seeks. Resources are targeted carefully so that their impact is maximised and, as a result, the centre offers good value for money.

*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>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>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>2</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>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>2</b>

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

The inspectors took into account the findings of the most recent inspection of Gloucester Nursery School, which was judged 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 Gloucester Nursery School and Children's Centre on 29–30 March 2011. We judged the children's centre to be good overall, and some aspects to be outstanding.

My colleague and I would like to thank all of you who made us feel so welcome and who gave their time to share their views of the centre with us. Without exception, you were full of praise for the centre and those who work there. You told us that you particularly like the warm and friendly way in which you are routinely greeted on first-name terms and made to feel welcome. For some people, the centre has been instrumental in changing their lives for the better, either by the support they get personally or by that provided for their children. There is a real sense of equality of opportunity whoever you are and the centre tries to make sure that there is no discrimination of any kind that might limit its effectiveness.

Some aspects of the centre are outstanding, perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the impact of the centre leader who has a clear vision for excellence in the services provided for you. As users, you are widely consulted and care is taken to evaluate your responses to user questionnaires and surveys. This helps to ensure that the services are meeting your needs and that you are supported effectively. At the same time, it enables you to find that a sense of community and enjoyment is

always present. This helps you to benefit well from attending the centre. Some services, such as the legal advice you can obtain, have helped many of you with serious problems you may have faced, most commonly with financial matters. Those of you who have faced domestic violence or have needed support to cope with problems caused by alcohol or drug abuse have also been given good support.

We are pleased to confirm that the arrangements for safeguarding you and your children are good and the training for staff is thorough and effective. The centre and the outreach sites are all safe and your children are looked after well when they attend. Children are able to show that they are making excellent progress from their various starting points from when they first come into contact with the children's centre. This is equally true for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities who receive coordinated support from a range of specialists. Children learn to behave well, to play and share things with other children and to develop positive relationships. They obviously get great enjoyment from joining in the activities like 'Messy Play' as do many of you.

There are a small number of things we have asked the centre to look at in order to become even better. We feel that the ways in which the different agencies work together to provide 'joined-up' services are still developing. We have asked the centre to consider its working arrangements with its partners carefully so that services can be the best possible, particularly for users who are vulnerable because of their circumstances and those who are hard to reach. We have also asked the centre to communicate more effectively with the expanding minority ethnic communities by using their home languages. Finally, we have asked the centre to develop a more extensive range of accredited courses that will support those of you who wish to return to work.

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