

Inspection report for Grange Children's Centre

Local authority	Harrow
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Centre governance	Harrow Local Authority
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Grange Nursery & Infant School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	None

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.

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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 one additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinator, the early years service manager for Harrow Council, a range of children's centre partners, health professionals, childminders, headteachers of partner schools and front line staff. They met parents and carers, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Grange Children's Centre is located in an urban area in the Borough of West Harrow, North West London. The locality in which the centre works has a diverse range of ethnic groups, with Asian Indian and Black African making up significant minorities. The centre is situated close to a large new social housing complex and the area has recently undergone significant regeneration. Much of the area is economically deprived. There is a mix of social and private housing served by the centre. Families frequently move in and out of the area. In the area as a whole, there are low levels of homelessness. Against national criteria, the proportions of families who receive benefits and unemployment rates in parts of the reach area are relatively high.

The centre provides a range of services including education and play programmes for children, courses and advice for parents and carers, home visiting, and support and community-based health services for a variety of users. The centre works closely with Hillview and Rayners Lane children's centres, and their services are complementary and planned together. Within the Grange reach area there are about 900 targeted children under five years of age. The centre has close links with the nursery and infant school on the same site. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge, skills and understanding generally below that found nationally.

Grange Children's Centre is managed and governed by Harrow Local Authority and managers also report to an extended services committee. It was designated as a phase 2 children's centre in May 2009.

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

The overall effectiveness of Grange Children's Centre is satisfactory and on a path of steady improvement. All safeguarding regulations are met, and the centre actively promotes equality and diversity through its programme of work. In partnership with the two local children's centres, the centre coordinator has established sound systems to meet the needs of users more fully, building good relationships with an increasing number of local families.

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory. The early years service manager and the centre coordinator, who work together effectively, are keenly aware of the issues and challenges in the communities they serve. As a result of satisfactory self-evaluation and development planning, there have been improvements in the areas targeted by the centre. Systems are embedded sufficiently to enable the centre to continue improving and team work is developing well to aid this. Leaders are keen to make their self-evaluation procedures good in the future. As such, they recognise that there is a need to conduct a more detailed analysis of the impact of the current services on the outcomes for the children and their families. Leaders correctly understand that this will enable them to plan even more effectively for the future.

Although the way the centre promotes community cohesion satisfactorily, aspects of the centre's work are good and demonstrate how leaders are working successfully to enhance this.

The purpose-built, small centre is well resourced for the activities it provides and serves as a welcoming 'drop-in' facility which is valued by parents and carers from increasingly diverse ethnic backgrounds. Those who work in the centre have a sound understanding of local families and their needs in this culturally diverse context.

The centre provides courses which have proved popular with users, particularly carer and toddler activities, parents as first teachers (PAFT) groups, nurture groups, and holiday activities for local children. The increased self-esteem and confidence of a number of regular users has been one of the significant successes since the centre opened.

The centre works closely with the nursery and infant school to which it is attached, and links between centre staff and those who teach the Early Years Foundation Stage are increasingly effective in tracking the impact of the centre's work on children's personal and social development. The centre enjoys a range of productive links with local partners, which have an impact on users' health improvement and the provision of play opportunities for children and their families. Centre staff are approachable, thrive on good relationships with users and have, on occasion, responded to changing the times of activities to best accommodate users' other commitments.

Discussion and written evaluations confirm that parents and carers are positive about their experiences with the centre. They value the helpful information about referrals to other agencies in the borough. One parent commented, 'It's a lifeline – if I didn't have this I wouldn't know where to go.' While another said, 'The staff have really supported me in how to meet my son's needs.'

The determined and committed approach of the centre coordinator underpins the centre's current effectiveness and capacity to improve. Under her leadership, the numbers of families registering at the centre have steadily increased. The coordinator is beginning to strengthen the way in which the current provision can be refreshed to offer progression and greater variety for regular users. Leaders and staff are keen to extend the services to more families who do not currently access the centre's satisfactory provision, and to widen their awareness of job and training opportunities. The centre has begun to regularly attract members of the local Somali and Tamil communities, and numbers attending sessions are beginning to rise. Challenges remain for parents to find their way to the centre which, although adequately signposted at the school gates, is tucked away in the school grounds. In the words of one parent, 'It's off the road and hidden in the school.'

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Strengthen the quality of self-evaluation so that those who have responsibility for the centre's development conduct a more detailed analysis of the impact of the current services on the outcomes for the children and their families.
- Increase participation and take-up in events, support programmes and work-related training by promoting current and new courses to as many hard-to-reach groups as possible.
- Ensure that the centre is as easy to find as possible.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Outcomes for children and families are satisfactory overall. In partnership with neighbouring centres, there has been a clear focus on health initiatives, which have proved successful. For example, users' attendance at midwives' clinics and breastfeeding groups is good. Outreach counselling services are considered to be very helpful, as evident by the strong take up amongst local families. Parents and carers commented on the success of the programme given by the oral hygienist. The centre is successful in signposting users to other agencies through a variety of flyers and online information, for example with smoking cessation, and as a result health outcomes locally are gradually improving.

Keeping children safe lies at the heart of the centre's onsite work with families. Child protection procedures and safeguarding regulations are keenly adhered to. Staff help parents and carers to reflect on different aspects of keeping themselves and their family safe, including fire prevention in the home and safety in the local streets. Parents and carers report that they feel more confident when dealing with minor injuries in the home. The centre's good record keeping indicates that it ensures the safety of vulnerable children and their families. Clear action is taken if there is a need for children to be supported through the Common Assessment Framework or if they need specific child protection plans, or if they are looked after children.

Working in conjunction with the nursery and infant school, the centre has focused to positive effect on the personal and social and language development of the children who attend the various courses. Notice boards around the centre promote the importance of play through photographs and information about the early learning goals. The childminders' group commented on how it values particularly the opportunity for children to take part in 'messy play' sessions, which many would not have space to experience in their own homes. As one noted, 'It's fantastic coming here and watching the children run around.' A number of parents and carers also commented how much they value the outdoor learning space at the centre as a place '...to have fun with water and paint and not to have to worry about splashing the furniture'. 'Little Chef, Big Food' and 'Sing, Move and Play' are other courses families consider to have been useful in promoting parenting skills, positive behaviour, and child development, particularly speech and language. One mother said 'I welcome the activity sheets with ideas of what I can do at home with the children.'

A notable feature of the centre is the way in which children from a wide range of backgrounds and interests enjoy indoors and outdoors play, girls and boys and their families mixing with one another with obvious ease, enjoyment and mutual respect. This impacts well on children's personal and social development and securely on community cohesion.

Staff collect short comments on what children and their families have enjoyed and what they would like to see more of in the centre. This is helping to ensure that

activities are fun, purposeful and suitable for the needs of the families. However, some opportunities are missed to make the very best of users' views in planning improvements. Nonetheless, the outcomes for families in their emotional and economic well-being are improving steadily, with staff noting a number of cases where families have talked about improved relationships within the family and better management of the home budget.

Information and guidance, which signposts job opportunities and access to employment, are available in many forms. A small proportion of parents made reference to the centre having introduced them to services such as Jobcentre Plus. As a result, a few parents and carers are beginning to find work or take up training opportunities. However, the centre has not yet promoted further education and training to very best effect. Nor has it established very robust procedures for recording its successes in these areas to show how the centre helped to improve the outcomes for families.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	3
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	3
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

3

The provision for families and their children is consistently satisfactory, and good in some aspects. Over the past two years the centre, as part of its growth and shared programme of services with the two neighbouring children's centres, has had increasing success in assessing the needs of children, parents and other users. The outreach services meet the needs of the wider community satisfactorily. For example, project workers and home visiting activities contribute usefully to this understanding of users' health, employment and social needs.

Individual case studies show good evidence of families and individuals in crisis being successfully supported and given important signposting to appropriate local and national agencies, for example in relation to help with debt repayments. However, a detailed study of the composition of the reach area has shown leaders that some potential users have not had their needs closely evaluated. As such, this is leading to

satisfactory rather than good provision for families in the area.

A relatively small, but increasing, number of families avail themselves of the courses and activities on offer. 'Fun Together' helpfully runs separate sessions for newborns to two-year-olds, and there is another session for those aged two to four years. Parents and carers comment that the course tutors are welcoming and that courses such as parents as first teachers (PAFT) are helpful. Courses to help parents and carers with their English skills are especially valued by those who speak English as an additional language. Parents and carers commented that these sessions contributed much to their own personal development, improving their parenting skills and giving them greater confidence in the workplace. However, opportunities are missed to ensure that regular users experience consistently purposeful learning of good quality and make the most of the toy library and the attractive book collection.

The quality and range of services offered are adequate, but the centre has not been sufficiently ambitious to broaden its offer, including courses with qualifications, based on a more searching analysis of needs. Nonetheless, activities which the centre organises are satisfactorily supported by a core group of users and, increasingly, by parents, carers and grandparents who have discovered the centre. The outdoor play area is a strong and popular aspect of the provision.

A number of users have turned to the centre in times of crisis and have been well supported with bespoke advice. As one explained, 'The worker is brilliant and I can't thank her enough.' Signposting to local services and to the partner children's centres is good. Families find the centre's systems for registration accessible, and are made to feel welcomed. At the start and end of individual sessions, parents and carers readily come to the main desk for advice, confident they will be met with a keen listening ear and a knowledgeable response. One parent summed up the quality of care offered by centre staff saying, 'The advice has helped me tremendously. My son has improved a lot after I've been coming here.'

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

As a result of clear leadership and management, the centre gives satisfactory value for money. The use of resources has a satisfactory impact on the outcomes for children and their families. Day-to-day management runs smoothly and staff,

including visiting tutors, have a good understanding of their defined roles and responsibilities. However, although teamwork is often good, there are too few regular formal team meetings in which the centre's priorities for improvement are discussed. Performance management systems are not fully in place. The service manager has an extensive brief covering all of Harrow's children's centres and gives line management time and support appropriately to Grange.

The extended services committee, which includes the headteacher, staff and a governor from the infant school, has supported the coordinator in a number of initiatives, for example in developing the premises, establishing a nurture group and by providing links with the after-school club. The committee has been supportive and is keen to improve. They know that there is more to do in order to be challenging, so as to ensure that the centre's impact could be better than satisfactory in meeting the very specific needs of harder-to-reach families and ethnic groups.

The new and well-kept resources for children's play are used appropriately by families and visitors, and centre staff keep a watchful eye to ensure surfaces are cleaned regularly and best health and safety practice is adhered to. Resources for cooking and music making are modest. There is limited space for private conversations and counselling to take place, although the centre ensures that rooms are provided in a neighbouring centre for a series of specialist counselling sessions.

The centre places appropriate emphasis throughout its work on promoting equality, especially for children with disabilities. Posters and photographs around the centre celebrate diversity and achievement for all, and more recently the centre has been successful in attracting fathers and grandfathers to attend sessions during the day.

The centre recognises and acts on its safeguarding responsibilities. Criminal Records Bureau procedures and staff checks are in place. The centre collaborates effectively with key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to any family members, for example social welfare workers making speedy referrals in the case of identified domestic violence. Leaders work closely with different agencies to extend the support for such aspects as emotional health and overall well-being. Access for users with physical disabilities is good, both indoors and outdoors, as are toilet and nappy-changing facilities. The centre is beginning to attract some of the most vulnerable adults, but there is more to do on this, for example by involving more users with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The centre collects generally accurate data of attendance at its activities throughout the year, and the service manager and centre coordinator study these data at intervals. Not enough very regular analysis has been conducted, and across the cluster of three centres, to evaluate the impact of courses and of outreach work. Leaders know this and Harrow's current consultation on children's centres is rightly focusing on which services have a positive effect on children's quality of life.

The centre engages productively with a well chosen range of partners, including the Paiwand Advocacy Service, Harrow Music Service and the Primary Care Trust. There

are suitable service level agreements with a number of providers, including Home Start Harrow, Citizens Advice Bureau and Relate, which lead to a breadth of services being open to the centre's users.

The centre offers satisfactory value for money because its users express the view that attendance at the centre has a positive impact on their families and the outcomes are satisfactory. Users benefit from the advice the centre staff offer and confirmed that they are put in contact with local authority and other services as appropriate. The centre has not had a consistently good impact across the wider reach area and as such provides satisfactory rather than good support.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
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	3

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Grange Children's Centre on 10 and 11 May 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We spoke to a number of families during our two days at the centre, and most families spoke positively about what the centre offers to them and their children, particularly the indoor and outdoor play facilities.

Parents and carers, including grandparents, agreed that the centre provides a warm and welcoming place to meet, and that centre staff are always willing to listen to any concerns they have, and offer useful advice. A number of parents and carers have attended various courses run by the centre. Those mentioned which were particularly enjoyed included parents as first teachers (PAFT), 'Little Chef, Big Food' and 'Sing, Move and Play'; with a number of parents saying that they would like to see these popular courses repeated more often. The centre staff need to analyse with you just how useful these courses are so that more and different courses can be established.

A number of childminders bring groups of children to the centre each week. They greatly appreciate, as parents and other carers do, the opportunities for children to have messy play in the safe and secure outdoor area with its attractive murals and shade from the trees. Links with the nursery and infant school are developing well, and more parents have now heard about the centre's work through their children who attend the school's breakfast and after-school clubs.

The centre has some interesting activities for families. With your help, the centre wants to promote its services to families who do not currently attend, including attracting parents and carers who might not know what it has to offer. We have also asked those who have responsibility for leading and governing the centre to see how hard-to-reach families in the wider community can be attracted to the centre.

Thank you to those who found time to talk to us during the inspection days while you were busy playing with your children. We hope you will continue to enjoy the benefits of what the centre is offering, and that you will help shape its future.

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