

Inspection report for Maxilla Children's Centre

Local authority	The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Inspection number	365811
Inspection dates	11–12 May 2011
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Maxilla Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Lancaster West Children's Community Network EY358621

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: May 2011



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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.

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.

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, staff, representatives from the local authority and partner agencies including representatives from the health service, and users of the centre. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the inspectors were unable to meet with a governor member of the advisory board, which is a committee of the school governing body, but were able to meet with other members of the governing body. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including evaluations of services, safeguarding policies and records, and minutes of meetings.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate

Information about the centre

Since January 2011, the local authority has designated Maxilla Children's Centre to work with three other children's centres in a locality model to deliver the full core offer. This area of London has high levels of wealth alongside pockets of poverty. The locality includes areas that are among the 30% most deprived. Around a quarter of the children in the borough are considered to be living in income-deprived households, concentrated more in the north, where Maxilla is based. The overall unemployment rate is above average, though the proportion of families receiving benefit is lower than most areas of central London and marginally lower than the

national average. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage in the locality with skills generally below the level expected for their age. The large majority of the population are of White British or other White heritages, with the remainder a mix of different ethnicities. The percentage of those of Black heritage in the locality is double that in the rest of the borough.

The centre is situated directly beneath the busy Westway. It includes the Maxilla Nursery School, inspected and reported on separately from this inspection. Most of the childcare is provided in other locality centres, and the on-site breakfast club is registered separately and provided by the Lancaster West Children's Community Network, so was not part of this inspection. The centre has experienced a number of changes in recent years, with different services co-located at different times. Though the centre has no senior leadership team, staff have clearly designated roles and responsibilities. A committee of members of the school governing body, parents and carers and representatives from other partner agencies make up the advisory board for this individual centre. However, the local authority has retained governance of the locality model, and convened a locality group to oversee the centres collectively.

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

2

Main findings

Maxilla Children's Centre provides a safe, warm and welcoming haven for the families it serves. One staff member summed it up by saying, 'You forget that you are directly beneath a motorway.' A good range of services and activities ensure the attractive environment staff have created within this spacious accommodation is used effectively. The centre's popularity, combined with careful timetabling, contributes to the constantly busy, vibrant and purposeful atmosphere. Users are overwhelmingly positive about what the centre provides, and feel safe and secure accessing its services. As one parent put it, 'This is our home.' They are confident to express their views, reflecting their good engagement and positive contribution to the centre community, and know that staff will always listen. One parent commented that they only had to mention something that they needed and the centre manager would '...make it so!' Those who attend sessions feel their personal outcomes are improved because staff are so friendly and approachable. Beneath the relaxed ambience that permeates the centre, robust and effective safeguarding systems protect its users.

The centre manager's inspirational leadership has successfully created a climate of high expectation that underpins the centre's good capacity to sustain improvement. There is a strong determination among frontline staff to succeed for the benefit of the community. They are consistently positive and professional in what are still

uncertain times for them as the locality model is fully established. Those who facilitate activities effectively evaluate and adapt provision to meet users' needs. Clear analysis and understanding of the centre's overall strengths and barriers to success have secured good provision and outcomes across all areas. The centre has implemented its own systems to evaluate the impact it has on improving outcomes for families. Children and adults enjoy and achieve well through popular and good-quality sessions provided at the centre. A range of well-coordinated services, both within the centre and across the locality, promotes effectively the adoption of healthy lifestyles, identified as a local priority. Those who use the centre mix well together and some spoke of the 'family atmosphere'. The celebration of diversity and promotion of equal opportunity, through better outcomes for groups whose contexts may make them potentially vulnerable, run through the centre's 'guiding principles'.

Some useful data are available to support evaluation of the positive impact on aspects of the being healthy, for example breastfeeding. However, long delays in the production of data, attributed by the local authority to difficulties with its computerised system, have hindered the ambition to secure the best possible provision and outcomes. Centre leaders do not always feel they are able to input the most pertinent information, and are concerned that early reports starting to emerge do not contain the specific detail required to fully demonstrate improved outcomes.

Governance arrangements are sound and supported by agreed terms of reference. The centre's own advisory board is focused strongly on the guiding principles for Maxilla, the safeguarding of all who use it and a desire to secure sufficiently robust data to inform future planning. However, there is a lack of understanding at different levels of its precise role within the new locality model. Partnerships between the centre managers from across the locality are good. Frontline staff from different agencies work well together and are clear of their own lines of professional supervision, though there is a lack of clarity about how these integrate with the centre's own management processes. In particular, uncertainty about who is responsible for the quality assurance of activities commissioned by the local authority that are delivered in the centre has prevented sufficiently rigorous monitoring of outcomes to promote even more notable improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the use of data to analyse the impact of services and to support future planning by:
 - ensuring that the local authority works closely with the centre to make certain that the most pertinent information is fed into the database
 - implementing plans to use data provided by the computerised system as a priority as soon as it is made available.
- Improve governance and accountability by:
 - ensuring that the role of the centre's own advisory board within the locality model is clearly defined and understood by all
 - integrating professional supervision with the centre's own management

processes to ensure responsibilities for quality assurance and monitoring of outcomes are clear.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Users' good attendance at sessions, due to the care taken by the centre to ensure it meets the aspirations and needs of the community, supports the achievement of good outcomes. For example, successful healthy-eating sessions focused on portion sizes came directly from requests from users. Similarly, the 'Cook and Taste' sessions were very well attended, with the large majority of parents and carers confirming it had improved their habits in preparing healthy meals for their family.

The locality family outreach team creates packages of support across the partner children centres, including for those who may be subject to child protection or child in need plans. Most indicate they are supported extremely well across all five outcome areas. Parents and carers involved in a locality pilot delivered in conjunction with the Sleep Advisory Service reported the positive impact this had on family life. Where the centre identifies concerns, it is proactive in initiating Common Assessment Framework procedures when it needs a higher level of intervention to secure good outcomes. The falling number of children-in-need childcare places commissioned by the local authority indicates the effectiveness of early intervention.

Well-integrated ante-natal and post-natal services form an important part of the successful healthy outcomes for users. Breastfeeding cafés, classes and clinics, weaning parties and the high numbers of staff trained in breastfeeding awareness are just part of a joined-up package that has secured above average rates of initiating and sustaining breastfeeding. However, data on other aspects of healthy lifestyles, such as obesity or smoking cessation, as well as other outcome areas, are not readily available to demonstrate fully the extent to which these are improving. Health professionals meet informally with mothers at the popular 'Get Back in Shape' class delivered in partnership with the local leisure centre. Interlinked with the promotion of healthy outcomes is the safety and protection of families. 'Talking Times', a post-natal support group, promotes better mental and emotional health for new mothers, as well as safe outcomes for their babies. The centre has good links with a child mental health worker and is proactive in the promotion of safety. Parenting course evaluations indicate good, safe outcomes for parents and carers and for their children through positive behaviour management. One parent acknowledged, in particular, the helpful input on domestic violence.

The good-quality crèche ensures more parents and carers attend sessions without their children if appropriate. One parent who was initially very reluctant to use it said, 'It was good for him and they were so delighted to see him each week it made you feel safe, special and cared for.' For some young children, it is the first time they have mixed with others of similar age, and members of staff are alert to these sessions as an opportunity for early identification of need. Many factors combine across the locality to contribute to the narrowing gaps at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage, including the success of the 'Every Child A Talker' programme,

and not least the outstanding achievement of children in the Maxilla Nursery. Maxilla Children's Centre makes a good contribution to this, both through its direct contact with children and the help it gives parents to support their child's development. Throughout the varied activities, children behave well and make good progress in their personal skills.

Adults develop personal skills extremely well through their engagement with the centre. Activities give a high priority to equipping parents with the skills and confidence they will need to secure employment. One group demonstrated their enterprising behaviour by creating their own 'spin-off' sewing group from the overwhelmingly popular sewing classes held at the centre. However, the centre is aware that the hardest-to-reach groups may still be 'hidden' in the community with their views unknown, as there is a lack of sufficiently robust data to track this, including those accessing the other centres in the locality. That said, the centre is busy and popular, users mix well, and the centre operates as an extremely cohesive community. As well as having representation on the advisory board, the parents' and carers' own forum is active and well thought of in the locality. High attendance at effective 'English for speakers of other languages' classes form a central part of adults' positive achievement outcomes. There is some evidence of centre activity having a good impact in supporting parents and carers who are seeking work. The Jobcentre Plus offer is principally through signposting and the use of regular jobs bulletins, although the local authority is still developing the system to monitor the impact of this.

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, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
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 and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

'The staff at Maxilla go out of their way to help families', was how one parent summed up the level of care. From the day-to-day work and activities, to times of family crisis where users feel secure to turn to the centre for help, they are confident in the guidance and support they receive. Effective teamwork, and good awareness of each other's roles and what they can offer, enable staff to find the right pathways through to a suitable package for individual families. In accordance with need, the

outreach team supports and guides families to the most appropriate provision in the children's centres across the locality. Outreach workers accompany parents and carers to unfamiliar centres to introduce them and ensure they can feel confident to access services. In addition to specific classes, the centre offers advice and guidance on a variety of topics. For example, through a partnership with the Children's Accident Prevention Trust, the centre provides parents and carers with information about where they can purchase home safety equipment at cost price. Some parents and carers spoke appreciatively of the financial management advice they had been given. The Police Community Support Officer regularly visits the centre to talk with parents, carers and children.

Frontline staff demonstrate a good level of sensitivity to the needs of individuals and use their assessments well to personalise services. Session facilitators gather information either through informal discussion or observation, or sometimes through more formal assessments or questionnaires. They use these well to target specific intended outcomes and promote good achievement through classes. Good partnership working ensures that assessment is holistic and robust. However, although all partners feed information into the local authority database, the delays in using this to produce meaningful reports mean that, currently, overall assessment is less rigorous than it could be.

There is a good range of services, both within Maxilla and across the locality. Effective communication between the centre managers and the overview by the local authority of the services it commissions directly help to avoid unnecessary duplication and maximise the breadth of activities. Participation rates are good, including for those typically considered hard to reach, such as teenage parents or fathers. One father, among the good numbers who attended the 'Men Behaving Dadly' group, was eager to explain how 'extremely beneficial' he had found it. From a different country, he said, 'I do not have my family here to teach me about parenting and to support me – the centre is my family.' Available data and tracking are not currently sophisticated enough to enable the centre to evaluate precisely its success in reaching all groups within the community and to always target sessions specifically. However, the centre adapts sessions carefully for known users, for example in planning 'English for speakers of other languages' courses. The centre effectively promotes purposeful learning for children and adults alike, often simultaneously. For example, the 'Letters and Sounds' workshop for parents and carers seen during the inspection effectively showed them how to help develop their children's reading and writing skills. As one parent said, 'The centre is very good at engaging parents fully in their children's learning.' Presentations celebrate the achievements of adults, and users appreciate the efforts of professionals in coming to present them with their certificates.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
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?

2

Within the locality model, available space and staff are utilised very well at Maxilla and the centre is rarely still or quiet for long. Considered alongside the good outcomes this effective provision secures, Maxilla provides good value for money. Centre staff understand their roles and responsibilities well and feel empowered to make decisions accordingly, which enhances the smooth day-to-day running of the centre.

The centre manager effectively and successfully communicates high expectations to frontline staff who are committed to the shared drive for improvement. As one person put it, 'She never rests until the job is done.' Through effective leadership, she has raised staff expectation of what is possible to achieve. Wide involvement at all levels in the creation of 'guiding principles' has helped secure commitment to the centre's vision.

Planning and evaluation make use of key performance indicators and the centre sets its own targets for outcomes in activities. However, due to technical difficulties, there have been long delays in the production of reports from the computerised system adopted by the local authority to support the work of its children's centres. The difficulties with securing precise baseline data and evidence of impact so far has prohibited more robust and meaningful target setting.

Terms of reference are in place for both the advisory board and locality group, but neither contains reference to how their roles link together. The advisory board understands well the barriers to further improvement faced by the centre and, within its scope, has made suitable plans to overcome these. Services commissioned directly by the centre are among the most popular. Partnership working between a wide range of different professionals and agencies, statutory, private and voluntary, is effective because it provides an integrated and cohesive approach for users.

There is a strong desire throughout all of the centre's work to break down potential barriers for different groups. Introductions from members of staff, who collectively speak a wide range of different languages, are clearly displayed with their photographs. Users who speak little or no English when they arrive at the centre do not feel this is a barrier at Maxilla. Although the centre is completely inclusive, provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is specifically targeted elsewhere in the locality, so engagement from this group of children and parents and carers is lower than it might otherwise be. The centre meets all statutory requirements in the promotion of equalities, which underpins the good practice embedded throughout the centre and there is no evidence of discrimination. Similarly, safeguarding procedures are robust due to the combination of effective

systems and the high priority staff at all levels give to this area. They are clear about procedures and effectively trained to recognise areas of concern. Adherence to tight management systems and procedures ensures the environment is safe for users. Employees and volunteers are subject to full employment and criminal records checks, recorded in a single central register. The large majority of Maxilla's work centres around universal prevention or early intervention, as the outreach team tends to guide those at most risk to centres that provide childcare. Where appropriate, though, the centre's record keeping is of good quality, and it works effectively with multi-agency partners, including in protecting families from domestic violence.

The centre is proactive in securing and using available information in evaluating the services it provides. Course facilitators have a good understanding of their role in evaluating short-term outcomes of individual services. There are some systems in place to evaluate longer-term impact, such as following up outcomes with service users after a period has lapsed. However, as creation of data is at an early stage, evaluation of longer-term impact lacks sophistication. The centre systematically seeks and utilises users' views as an integral part of its self-evaluation, both formally and informally.

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

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

The inspection of Maxilla Nursery School on 10–11 May 2011.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Maxilla Children's Centre on 11 and 12 May 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who took the opportunity to meet with or speak to us during the inspection. We greatly appreciated your contributions. We used evaluations you have completed for the centre to get a broader picture of your views of the centre, which are overwhelmingly positive. We can see why you find the attractive environment and friendly staff to be so warm and welcoming. We felt the 'family atmosphere' about which so many of you spoke. You told us how well those who work at the centre listen to you, and we found they work well together to offer the right things to help and support you. The centre manager's inspirational leadership and the determination and professionalism of the frontline staff place the centre well to get even better.

Beneath the happy, relaxed atmosphere that you experience at the centre are good systems to keep you safe and protected. You and your children achieve well through the good-quality sessions the centre offers. We were pleased to see how many of you take these opportunities and how busy the centre is. We noted how those of you who complete courses appreciate having certificates presented to you. The centre works well with a variety of health professionals to provide good antenatal and post-natal support. It has worked well with you to promote healthy eating. You make an important contribution to the success of the centre by giving your views and suggestions. Your parents' and carers' forum is well thought of locally. It is lovely to see how you are really making the centre your own, for example creating your own spin-off sewing group from the exceptionally popular classes. The crèche is good and makes an important difference for some of you who would not be able to attend sessions otherwise.

As you may know, the local authority has decided that Maxilla should work with other children's centres in the area to offer you services. There is not currently enough understanding of how Maxilla's own advisory board fits in with this. It is not always clear enough who is supposed to check the quality of activities offered through the local authority rather than by the centre directly. The centre has designed its own ways to evaluate how its services help you, but is waiting for

specific information to be produced from the local authority's database. Technical difficulties have delayed this. We have asked the local authority and centre to work closely together to make sure that the right information will be available, so that it can be used to make the centre as good as it possibly can be.

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