

Inspection report for St Margaret's Nursery School and Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Barnet
Inspection number	365850
Inspection dates	11–12 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Champak Chauhan

Centre governance	The governing body
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	St Margaret's 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.

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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the senior leaders and other staff of the centre, members of the governing body and the advisory board, parents and carers, staff from the local authority and representatives from the health service. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

This inspection focused on the children's centre, which is part of St Margaret's Nursery School and Children's Centre. The children's centre is situated in a converted Victorian school house which adjoins the nursery school. It opened in January 2008 and serves a relatively affluent area which masks some pockets of deprivation. Services are delivered from a variety of venues, as well as the centre itself. The sessions offered include: 'stay and play' for under-fives; music and movement; baby rhyme time; toddlers' read and rhyme; baby massage; breast feeding support; creative play; and sessions for childminders. The centre also offers advice and guidance on work and welfare rights and has close links with the local health centre.

The centre serves a predominantly White British community, with relatively small numbers from minority ethnic groups. The ethnic mix is constantly changing due to the allocation of temporary housing within the borough. A growing proportion of families are from Eastern Europe. An increasing proportion of children aged 0 to 4 live in households dependent on workless benefits and one in five families is eligible for the childcare element of working tax credit.

The centre is run by the local authority. Senior leaders report to the school's governing body which has responsibility for the centre. The coordinator of the centre is responsible to the headteacher of the nursery school. Most children transfer to the nursery school and their levels of entry to early years' provision are broadly average.

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

2

Main findings

St Margaret's Children's Centre is highly valued by the community it serves. Senior leaders, the governing body and the advisory board are strongly focused on promoting a good range of services so that the needs of all users are met. They are seeking to maintain services in a climate of shrinking resources and the decommissioning of some services. However, morale remains high, staff work hard and innovative methods are being devised to ensure that users' needs are met. This includes greater collaboration with a neighbouring children's centre and by taking over responsibility for a local community centre. Leaders continue to maintain close links with the health service and are strengthening links with others, for example the local church.

There are high expectations among all staff about securing improvement and helping users, particularly the most vulnerable. This is based on good analysis of needs, which has arisen from good local knowledge, and good working partnerships with other agencies. The centre has a tangible culture of ensuring that the needs of all groups are met and the philosophy of good inclusion, as well as the promotion of equal opportunities, permeates all that it does. It has been particularly successful recently in attracting significantly more children from minority ethnic backgrounds, and lone parents and fathers. The centre works closely with others to meet the needs of asylum seekers and transient families from Eastern Europe. The exemplary outreach work, for instance with those experiencing mental health problems, has led to much better outcomes for such families. Users enjoy the services provided and many sessions are oversubscribed. As one mother said, 'The services on offer...are fantastic', while another said, 'It is like one big happy family'.

Outcomes for users are good and those for keeping safe are outstanding. This is because the centre has exemplary procedures for safeguarding that are supported by the outstanding quality of care, guidance and support. The high priority placed on this work ensures that children and their parents and carers have developed an excellent understanding of keeping themselves safe. Users also adopt healthier lifestyles. This is evident in, for example, the promotion of healthier eating and

participation in regular physical exercise by the children. The welcoming environment has ensured that activities promote good achievement for all users. Children's personal development is greatly enhanced, while parents and carers are improving their parenting and other social skills. Further training is organised for adults who wish to improve their literacy and numeracy skills to secure employment.

The centre is managed well by the two senior leaders and team work is well established. Their drive, hard work and vision have led to improved services accompanied by an underlying ethos of continuous self-reflection. Some evaluation procedures are strong. However, the centre has not generated enough data to help it further strengthen its evaluation, for example in rigorously collating and analysing data on children's progress. In addition, it does not have access to the full range of data it needs from the local authority and the health service to help it evaluate its performance against all relevant national indicators.

The governing body has set appropriately challenging priorities, and targets have been identified and met. As a result, overall performance has been consolidated and outcomes are improving for users. Action to overcome weaknesses and improve outcomes has been concerted and effective. As a result, the centre has good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that the centre gathers and analyses a greater range of data about its effectiveness so that it can measure outcomes more rigorously.
- Ensure that the local authority and health service provide the centre with the full range of relevant data so that the centre can better analyse its performance against national indicators.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre's good provision ensures that outcomes for all users are equally positive. A significant strength of the centre is the extent to which it enables users, particularly children, to stay safe. Children are very well behaved and have due regard for their own safety and that of others. Parents' and carers' understanding of keeping their children safe is enhanced through role modelling by the staff, which is backed by sharing booklets on safety at home. Parents and carers value the way that the local police and fire service run sessions to discuss issues of safety, both within and outside the home. This has enabled them to review their security and fire protection procedures. Users have every confidence in sharing concerns with the staff and they feel safe at the centre. The support offered to vulnerable families through outreach

work is the result of excellent inter-agency working and the initiation of the Common Assessment Framework for affected individuals. These processes are thorough and often exemplary. The centre has very robust systems to ensure the care and protection of children subject to child protection plans or any looked after children. At the moment, there are no children with child protection plans or identified in the looked after group.

Parents and carers are developing a good understanding of how to keep their children healthy. Families are aware of healthier eating, and parents, carers and their children prepare and cook healthy food in the 'Fun with Food' sessions. This is complemented with the growing and use of fresh vegetables and herbs, for example potatoes, tomatoes and coriander, in the outdoor areas. Children care for these well. Parents agree that they value the infant feeding and toilet training sessions run by the community nurse because it helps them greatly with their parenting skills. Awareness of oral health is enhanced by the health worker who has successfully encouraged children to regularly brush their teeth. The adoption of healthier lifestyles is promoted through regular physical exercise. Children enjoy playing in the high quality, safe outdoor area in all weathers. For example, they play ball games, run, jump and participate in parachute games, which help them to be fit and develop their coordination and agility well.

Users enjoy activities, many sessions are oversubscribed and the use of group work promotes good relationships. Children make good progress in developing their skills for the future, with some making excellent progress. Evidence indicates that they are prepared well for their next stage of education although the analysis of data about this is not always rigorous enough. Children in the 'stay and play' sessions make good progress in their personal development. They show curiosity, make choices and are enabled to become more independent learners. Parents and carers enhance their parenting skills through participating in activities with their children, for example baby massage sessions, and through helping to plan some other activities. One parent stated, 'I found this group (baby massage) very beneficial as it showed me how to relate to my baby in a calming atmosphere, and (I) got to meet other people.' Families enjoy the themed holiday activities which are offered and in July and August each year as many as 200 families attend such activities.

The needs of adult users are met effectively. Officers from welfare rights organise drop-in sessions regularly to give advice on childcare and other benefits. Other users are also referred to the local Citizens Advice Bureau. Access to further training has been significantly improved recently as a response to local need. Training courses on literacy and numeracy are being run with the help of a local college and take-up rates are good. The centre has had some success in ensuring that users find employment.

The centre's role in the life of the community is good and effective systems are in place for users to communicate their views. Users participate in the decision-making process well and some are involved in the governance of the centre, or are members of the advisory board. This helps to ensure that users' needs are evaluated and

development plans organised to meet their changing needs.

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	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

Centre staff know the local community well and have established a good network to help identify and assess different needs. They have longstanding relationships with other professionals and work effectively with a good range of partners to assess needs, especially partners from the health service. Referrals are routinely made to centre staff from the local health centre, with which there are excellent relationships. Staff regularly visit the health centre to liaise with families. There are very good formal and informal networks to help identify families facing crises. The family support workers who specialise in outreach work are well known in the community. They have successfully helped asylum seekers, families experiencing domestic violence, and those suffering from the misuse of drugs. Users often refer themselves for help and advice, indicating the respect with which centre staff are held.

The good and cohesive partnership working ensures that assessment procedures are thorough. There is close liaison with a neighbouring children's centre and a local community centre, which enables a good flow of information in identifying vulnerable families. Centre staff, governors and members of the advisory board are constantly reflective of the services the centre offers and will respond to changing circumstances. A smaller group for a few children, for instance, has been created from a 'stay and play' group to enable needs to be better met.

The centre engages with users regularly and effectively. Activities are carefully planned and promote good learning and development, with enjoyment for all. One parent stated, 'I found the baby and toddler drop-in sessions with midwives and healthcare professionals extremely helpful. I sought their advice on a regular basis...' Another parent said about the baby rhyme time sessions 'It has helped me realise that my baby loves and responds to songs very well.' The centre's activities are of good quality with a wide range of resources that suit children of all ages and abilities.

Staff have intimate knowledge about vulnerable families and others. The family support workers give highly effective personalised support to vulnerable individuals, for example to those suffering from depression or paranoid schizophrenia. The needs of families are monitored regularly.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The care and concern of staff in ensuring the health and welfare of all are evident in the centre's outstanding approach to safeguarding. All appropriate policies, including those for child protection, are in place and these are regularly reviewed by the governing body. Three members of staff are designated persons for child protection. Staff are very knowledgeable about child protection issues and the procedures to follow. Staff training in safeguarding is wide ranging and also includes fire safety, food hygiene and first aid. Safer recruitment training has been undertaken by relevant staff and governors. The centre has a comprehensive single central record which shows that rigorous checks have been made to ensure that staff and volunteers can work with children and vulnerable adults. All staff, governors, volunteers and others who regularly come into contact with children have been appropriately checked by the Criminal Records Bureau. The site is secure and all staff are vigilant about not allowing any unauthorised access to the premises.

There are excellent procedures for making referrals for vulnerable users. The sharing of information between centre staff and health professionals, for example, has led to early intervention in supporting children and their families. A wide range of intervention work has been undertaken by the family support workers. Any families experiencing domestic violence are supported well and there is good awareness among staff of dealing with such issues. Some children are also referred to speech and language therapists. The centre's coordinator for special educational needs works closely with the nursery school and with the local authority in identifying children whose may benefit from additional intervention, for example those with autistic spectrum disorders.

Leaders and managers at all levels are effective and they possess an unrelenting

drive towards improving services. There is a deeply embedded vision for improving the life chances of users from all backgrounds. Staff share these aspirations and they are highly trained and well qualified. The governing body provides good strategic direction to the work of the centre, with good support and challenge. There is good multi-agency cooperation through the advisory board leading to the better integration of services. Systems for accountability are known and understood by all. The centre sets challenging targets for itself and ensures that these are met. As a result, overall performance has been consolidated and enhanced. The centre offers good value for money.

Some aspects of evaluation are strong. The centre constantly seeks feedback on its services and gaps in provision have been identified. For example, parents of babies aged between one and two years old wanted particular learning sessions and this was done. However, the centre has not yet generated comprehensive data about its performance, and the local authority has not ensured that the centre has access to the full range of performance data that it needs to evaluate its services against national performance indicators.

The centre focuses well on promoting equality and diversity, although it has not yet had any substantial dealings with children with disabilities and is examining ways of doing so. The centre has, however, made good links with parents and carers with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and it has helped adult users who are hearing-impaired and visually-impaired. Outcomes for families have improved considerably as a result of the centre's involvement, for example by securing employment. Parents are successfully recruited as volunteers at the centre to help improve their personal development and to foster their confidence.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
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	1
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	2

integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	
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

St Margaret's Nursery School was inspected in January 2011. It was judged to be outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the St Margaret's Children's Centre on 11 and 12 May 2011. Thank you to all of you who found the time to speak to us. We judged the centre as good overall.

St Margaret's has many strengths and it is valued by all of you. You rightly speak highly of all that it does for you and your children. The centre offers you a good range of services, including 'stay and play' for the under-fives, music and movement, baby rhyme time, toddlers' read and rhyme, baby massage, breast feeding support, creative play, and sessions for childminders. The centre also offers you good advice and guidance on welfare rights and has close links with the local health centre so that your needs can be better met. You and your children attend the sessions regularly and you enjoy them because they enable you and your children to make good progress and to achieve well. They enhance your personal and social development well. As one of you said, 'I found the baby and toddler drop-in sessions with midwives and healthcare professionals extremely helpful. I sought their advice on a regular basis...'

The centre is conspicuously successful in ensuring that you and your children are kept safe. This is because its procedures for safeguarding are exemplary. All relevant policies and procedures are in place and appropriate checks are carried out on all staff, governors, volunteers and others who have regular access to children. Staff training on safeguarding is very comprehensive. Safeguarding issues have high priority and, as a result, you and your children have an excellent understanding of how to keep yourselves safe, both at the centre and at home. You and your children are also made aware of how to adopt healthier lifestyles through eating healthier

food. Your children are regularly involved in outdoor physical activities at the centre, regardless of the weather. Sessions are characterised by good relationships between children and adults and there is mutual respect among all. Behaviour is good and, sometimes, excellent. Your children develop their skills for the future well and they are prepared well for their next stage of education. In addition, the centre offers you the opportunity to improve your independence by undertaking further training for employment. Some of you do this well and successfully.

Staff have developed a good network to gather information within the community and to assess needs. There is good partnership working with others for this, leading to the provision of more cohesive services for you.

Staff are very approachable and many of you confide in them. Their level of care and commitment to you is very evident and they offer you excellent support and guidance. The family support workers, for instance, have been successful in helping some of you to secure housing. They have also worked with some of you to ensure that medical and other personal problems have been dealt with by health professionals. Those of you involved with them have valued their input because they helped you overcome barriers to work or personal difficulties.

The high levels of care and concern reflect the high expectations set by senior leaders and others. Senior leaders work hard and are highly respected. They provide strong leadership and direction to the work of the centre, and the governing body has set appropriately challenging priorities and targets. The centre is successful in meeting or exceeding these.

Some aspects of evaluation are particularly strong. The staff are constantly reflecting on how they can improve services for you and your children, and they regularly seek your views. You willingly give these, both in formal evaluations and in informal feedback. The centre responds effectively to what you say about the services and their quality. Gaps in provision have been addressed. Some services have been introduced, for example the sessions for one- to two-year-olds, as a direct response to your wishes. However, other aspects of evaluation are not as strong. The centre is not routinely collecting the full range of data about its own effectiveness, for instance about your children's progress. In addition, the local authority and health service are not yet providing the centre with the full range of data that it needs to evaluate its performance against national indicators. We have asked the centre, the local authority and the health service to address these.

We sincerely wish all of you the best for the future.

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