

# Inspection report for Underhill Infants School and Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Barnet
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Linked school if applicable	Underhill Infants School 101301
Linked early years and childcare	Underhill Infants School and Children's Centre EY390216

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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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision at the centre was carried out in February 2011 under section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

An inspection of the infants school was carried out in October 2009 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).

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, representatives from the local authority, members of the governing body, and a range of providers, users and staff. Inspectors observed the centre's work including provision at the centre and other sites. They looked at relevant documentation including the centre's operational plans, self-evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

## Information about the centre

Underhill Infants School and Children's Centre was designated a phase two centre in 2008 and serves a large, densely populated residential area with an ethnically diverse community in the town. In parts of the locality, communities live in the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. A high number of properties are council owned and a high proportion of the population are low-income families. An above-average proportion of families claim benefits, as the incidence of worklessness, at around 22%, is a little higher than the national average. While around half of the families are of White British heritage, a large minority, around 40%, represents a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest groups being Black African and Eastern European. The centre serves an overall population of around 1,730 which includes 705 children aged five years or under. A high proportion of these children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills that are well below those expected for their age. A significant proportion come from

homes where English is spoken as an additional language. Within the area the centre serves, there are significant issues surrounding extreme poverty, unemployment, poor health, low levels of literacy and numeracy, and high levels of crime.

Under the strategic management of the local authority, the governing body of Underhill Infants School governs the centre and works in partnership with a range of agencies to deliver the services and activities on its behalf in the local area. The headteacher of the infants school oversees the work of the centre and the day-to-day running is led by the centre manager. The centre offers a range of health, social care, and education and family support services. It also provides regular crèche sessions for parents attending courses, clinics or meetings at the centre.

Childcare for children aged from 18 months to five years is provided on site under the governance of the Underhill Infants School. This provision was inspected in December 2010. Education for children aged between three and four years in the Early Years Foundation Stage is provided by the nursery on the same site as the centre and this provision was inspected in 2009. Both reports can be found on the Ofsted website at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>

## 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

The children's centre offers its community good provision in a very warm, welcoming and safe environment. The overall outcomes for children and their families are good. Provision for children's academic progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding and as a result children have a very good start in life. Centre users say staff respect and value them and do everything they can to help develop their confidence and a sense of well-being. They appreciate the positive impact this has on their lives. A typical view expressed by a user was, 'The centre has helped me become a better parent – it has changed my life; my children are thriving as a result.'

In strong partnership with the local authority, a key strength is the good leadership

provided by the headteacher, the centre manager and her management team. All leaders model good practice, promote positive relationships throughout and set high standards for others to follow. Their commitment to improve opportunities for those in the community with the greatest needs is strongly evident in the rising numbers using the centre. The good safeguarding and equality procedures ensure that everyone is treated with respect and that their needs are met well. Users' views are heard through regular consultation and via discussions and evaluations. As a result, they are playing an increasingly important role in determining the priorities for the services the centre provides. The multi-agency advisory group and the local authority lend their expertise and support, and challenge the centre to provide better outcomes for all its users, but especially those who are harder to reach.

Over the last year, the centre has been particularly successful with those who are harder to reach, with a notable rise in the numbers of minority ethnic families, lone parents and children under five using the centre on a regular basis and an increasing number of adults attending adult education and training courses. This has been through a concerted effort to promote the centre's services and the benefits to local families, particularly through outreach activities including referrals from partner providers and through the excellent partnership with the nursery and infants school. It has rightly resulted in the centre being considered by a number of users as a 'good place to go for help and advice and a place to make and meet friends'.

The outcomes for users are good because provision is good. Provision is strongest when the centre uses the expertise of professionals, for example from schools, police, social care, voluntary organisations and housing associations, to influence its work in order to help families become more independent and self-reliant. Information from course evaluations and data generated by the local authority are used effectively to plan developments and set targets. Development planning accurately reflects the changing profile of the area the centre serves. While information from most partners, including some healthcare professionals, for example speech therapists and midwives, is readily forthcoming because partnership working is well embedded, partnership with health services generally is not as well developed. Information exchange is not always effective or efficient to support individual families, for example regarding national priorities such as breastfeeding, smoking cessation, emergency hospital admissions, teenage pregnancies and support for young parents. As a result, the outcomes for health are satisfactory.

Action to overcome gaps in provision and improve outcomes is effective. Leaders are proactive in ensuring that any areas identified as weaknesses are addressed promptly and all users regularly informed of changes. Leaders are accurate in their self-evaluation and acknowledge that they need to work in closer partnership with all their partners to improve further. The local authority provides a robust quality assurance role. This provides the centre with good capacity to build on these successes and further improve outcomes for families and children.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Establish more effective partnership working with the health services by implementing procedures whereby data regarding the health profile of families in the local area are shared regularly on a formal basis.
- Ensure that this information is used to plan provision that secures good outcomes for all groups of users regarding local health issues.

## How good are outcomes for users?

2
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Activities 'buzz' with excitement as children arrive eagerly to participate in the many activities offered; parents join in enthusiastically to play and learn alongside their children. Sessions are well attended, with some such as 'Read and Rhyme time' and 'Stay and Play' regularly oversubscribed. Families needing urgent support are accommodated promptly so they benefit quickly. All groups that attend the centre, from a variety of backgrounds, work and play together harmoniously. The centre addresses users' feelings of isolation very effectively, with a number saying in their evaluations that, 'It has given me a place to go to make friends and shown me how to be a better parent.' Families access a range of services and develop a sense of belonging through the good relationships the centre promotes. A typical view is, 'This is the one place I know people will listen to my problems without looking down on me. Staff in the centre are friendly and helpful – nothing is too much trouble.' A number report that as a result, their self-esteem has improved and that they can now tackle problems more easily.

Good information and practical advice help improve, for example, users' parenting skills so that they can support their children's learning more effectively. Parents report that they have developed better understanding of how their children learn through the many family activities, such as the 'Giggle Wiggles' and 'Messy Play' sessions. They say that health workers, such as midwives and health visitors, are helpful in providing useful information and signposting them to appropriate services to improve their lives. For example, the 'Wicked Wednesday' speech and language support provides parents with excellent guidance on how to extend their children's communication skills and 'Movers and groovers' shows parents the importance of physical exercise to promote children's mobility and coordination. Excellent outdoor facilities and resources give children the space they do not always have at home to climb, explore and discover for themselves, and thus develop their confidence and skills. Children with disabilities are supported well and specialist staff work with family workers to ensure positive outcomes for parents and children. Aspects of community health such as the increasing teenage pregnancy rates, smoking, particularly among young people, and childhood obesity levels are a concern in the community. The health service provides good guidance on breastfeeding and weaning to ensure children have a healthy start in life. However, parents and carers do not always sustain these good practices by having the opportunities to learn, for example, to cook healthy meals for their children as they grow or the support they

need to stop smoking and engage more in keep fit and healthy lifestyle activities.

Parents and carers have a good understanding of how to keep their children safe and happy by adopting the good guidance they receive from the centre's family workers. Relationships between centre staff and families are very trusting. This allows staff to identify, quickly and sensitively, any safety concerns and intervene appropriately before a crisis occurs. Home visits to families following referrals ensure that children are safe at home. Any children on child protection plans are supported well because partnerships between the multi-disciplinary teams are effective. Access to a good parenting course that includes behaviour and anger management has helped some parents secure better relationships, behaviour and home safety for their children and to ease flashpoints at times of stress and distress when problems arise at home.

Children are very well prepared for nursery and school through the outstanding provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage at the centre. High-quality learning experiences have a positive impact on their learning and development. With the high emphasis on improving children's speaking and listening skills, the speech therapy service identifies early any children who need additional support and as a result all children make excellent progress. The learning outcomes for adult learners, while generally good, are not as effectively monitored by the centre to ensure all adults who undertake education and training achieve well. A good number of parents, particularly from hard-to-reach groups, attend various courses, including literacy and numeracy, through the local college, and this enables them to support their children's learning at home and increases their own opportunities for further education and training. As a result of the guidance the centre offers, a few have successfully secured employment. This success raises confidence and self-esteem, enabling users to progress to further courses. A small number new to learning English attend relevant classes to help them settle into their new language and culture effectively. Although links with Jobcentre Plus are limited, centre staff offer relevant information and guidance that is tailored to meet individual needs and circumstances. As one parent wrote, 'I got the job because the centre helped me write a CV that was the best out of 500 applicants.'

Behaviour throughout is outstanding because everyone feels valued. As a result, all parties enjoy being there. Parents and carers, including childminders, attend various play sessions and training activities led by centre staff enabling children to experience consistent practices at home and in school so that their needs are met more effectively. Users are encouraged to suggest ideas for future activities; the 'Dads' group, which lapsed for a while is being regenerated by a volunteer father from the local community. Parents have a voice on the governing body and advisory board, and in making decisions to improve the quality of life for families in their community. As a result, users are developing relevant skills and qualifications to equip them for the world of work and improve their life chances.

*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</b>	<b>3</b>
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<b>healthy lifestyles</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 their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</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>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

**2**

Outreach services are generally effective in meeting the needs of the wider community. The centre is effective in signposting the increasing number of families of minority ethnic origin to welfare benefits and, if appropriate, courses in English as an additional language. Home visits are programmed, with target families given high priority, and outcomes following these visits are monitored well. Partnerships with social care are good. As a consequence, family workers coordinate with care workers effectively to support families in crisis and involve other agencies such as housing, police and welfare benefits if appropriate. When emergencies arise, family workers from the centre are quick to respond and flexible in meeting individual needs. This personalised support is a strength and users appreciate its value. Families where members' disability limits their capacity to access the centre receive additional support, often involving providers such as the portage service and childcare so that individual needs are identified early and met well.

Sessions and courses are of good quality and purposeful. For example, in 'Family Links', the crèche provide stimulating opportunities for parents, grandparents, carers and their young children to enjoy quality time together. Children explore in a safe, nurturing environment; parents receive good quality advice and support from professionals and have valuable time to share experiences with each other. Sessions for families who need specific support are very sensitively managed so that these users are enabled to become more self-reliant. Users understand the relevance of training and attendance at sessions in improving their lives. While not all are ready to take up formal education courses, a good number attend the various childcare/parenting courses regularly and keenly engage in activities to help them support their children's learning and development. Attendance at these activities is rising as many return regularly in order to maintain good habits and extend their confidence. However, without relevant data regarding health profiles of families in the area, for example incidents of accidents in the home, new births and immunisation rates, centre staff are unable to target activities to supplement the health service provision to have further impact on improving the lives of families who may need additional health care.



The centre assesses and reviews users' needs well and consults with individuals, groups and providers as to where to target further provision. The children's 'learning journeys' reflect high-quality assessment and tracking and, as a result, each child receives the help they need to make outstanding progress. Parents and other carers are shown how they can help and joint assessments record the child's successes effectively through notes and photographs. Signposting and referral to services and courses for adults are generally good. Individuals requesting specific help or guidance, for example in seeking employment and training, receive this promptly, which may include attending other centres in the town. In centre-based courses, staff assess individual needs well and encourage parents to keep learning logs to measure their progress. Staff are less vigilant about tracking the progress of adults they refer on to college courses to assess their achievements or promote further opportunities.

The overall quality of care for users and their children is good. Very good care arrangements on site ensure children are safe and well at all times. The centre's family workers have had to respond swiftly on occasions but have done so in a very professional and sensitive manner, and this has resulted in positive outcomes that effectively support community cohesion. Support for users' well-being is high priority and families report that their lives are better for having the specific help they needed, particularly at low points in their lives.

*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**

The local authority and centre leaders and managers have a clear view of the quality of provision and where improvements need to be made. Self-evaluation is largely accurate. Staff supervision arrangements and performance management procedures are robust; expectations of all staff are high and they have good professional development opportunities to improve their practice. Users' views help to inform evaluations and shape developments. They offer their views at meetings, after activities and through home visits, email and text. This inclusive approach allows everyone to have their say about the services their community wants or needs.

The centre's development plan addresses local and national priorities effectively and is based on analysis of regional data and information. Some partners provide timely and relevant information to influence the development of the provision but this is not

yet consistent across all providers. The local authority reviews the centre's progress regularly with centre leaders and has set challenging and ambitious targets including in aspects of health provision that is currently not addressed effectively through centre activities. Aspirations are high to serve the families most in need well.

Equality and diversity are promoted successfully. This is because all services are designed to engage users from the range of backgrounds in the local area. Any families experiencing particular hardship, for example with respect to debts, receive sensitive support that enables them to cope with legal issues and plan their spending more effectively. The 'First friends' group successfully supports parents with new babies to meet, make friends and share news about their babies' development; plans are in place to extend this provision when new births information becomes available.

The leaders are keen to extend partnership working to ensure a cohesive and cost-effective service to the community, particularly in areas of high deprivation. Leaders ensure a wide variety of users and community groups use the facilities. Home visits, leafleting and productive children's centre and child-minding networks in the town help users go further afield to extend their opportunities. The centre uses a few volunteers to assist staff with running groups and one father has offered to organise the 'Dads' group to encourage them to improve their relationships with their children and families effectively. The centre recognises that it is in a position to make greater use of volunteers, self-help groups and community venues to plan activities that further enhance local needs, for example cookery courses and for young parents.

All the safeguarding and child protection procedures are robust and all centre staff implement stringent checks to secure the safety of children and their families. All staff have had the relevant training for child protection, safeguarding and first aid, and liaise very effectively with other agencies to ensure children and their families are cared for well. 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>2</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>2</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>2</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>3</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 inspections of the Underhill Infants School and Children's Centre in 2009 and 2010 both concluded that provision for childcare for children aged between 18 months and five years was good and children achieve well.

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## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Underhill Infants School and Children's Centre on 12 and 13 July 2011. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents, and had discussions with some of you, your children and the staff that work there. Thank you to everyone who took the time to come and speak to us, we are very grateful. Following this visit, we have judged that the centre provides good support to you and your families.

The centre provides a good range of services that help you to improve your lives. You appreciate the positive approach of all staff and were eager to explain how the centre has supported your families successfully. We were impressed to hear that you regard the centre as a safe, happy and welcoming place, and where you make good friends. We can see that the work the centre does in the community has transformed some families' lives. The number of families that the centre works with is increasing year on year with many of you returning to access more services as your families grow and your needs change. This shows us that the centre does its job well.

The centre works well with a range of partners and providers such as social care, education and some health services. It provides good support and facilities for your children so that they make an outstanding start in their learning. Adults are guided well as they undertake various education and training courses in order to achieve their potential. Attendance at courses has resulted in a good number being able to support their children's learning at home and in their own access to work. Most

providers work very closely with the centre to provide you with the best service possible but partnerships with the health services are less well established. This sometimes does not help centre staff plan activities that might help improve your knowledge of, for example, how to keep your families fit and healthy by cooking healthier meals; supporting you if you are trying to stop smoking; or encouraging more new parents to participate in all that the centre offers.

The variety of courses and services provided meets a wide range of needs well. 'Stay and Play', 'Giggle Wiggles' and 'Read and Rhyme time' sessions are very popular and provide good opportunities for grandparents, carers, parents and your children to play, explore and learn together. The centre has worked particularly successfully with those families that are in most need and minority ethnic families who need help with settling into a new country. As a result, your families have benefited through improved relationships and a better understanding of how to be better parents, keep your children safe, and help them develop the skills they need to make a very good start in life. A few of you play a very vital role as volunteer helpers so that you too make a valuable contribution to improving the community in which you live.

The local authority oversees the centre's work effectively and the centre is led well by the headteacher, manager and her team. Staff are supported and challenged by their senior managers to ensure they strive to improve outcomes for all families and improve the prospects for the community as a whole. Staff encourage you to offer your views and ideas so that they can personalise the support they offer and meet your individual and family needs effectively and sensitively.

We have made the following recommendations to help improve the centre.

- Strengthen the partnership working with the health service by ensuring that the data regarding the health profile of the families in the local area are shared with the centre.
- Ensure that this information is used to plan the support necessary to improve the health outcomes for users in the community.

We wish you every success for the future.

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