

# Inspection report for Overland Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Tower Hamlets
<b>Inspection number</b>	367853
<b>Inspection dates</b>	26–27 July 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Sheena MacDonald HMI

<b>Centre governance</b>	Tower Hamlets Local Authority
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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Overland Children's Centre Nursery

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the community leader, other members of staff, key partners, representatives of the local authority, the advisory board and groups of parents and carers.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Overland Children's Centre serves a socially and economically mixed community and within the centre's reach area there are pockets of deprivation, with high levels of unemployment and families living on low incomes or benefits. The area is undergoing a period of rapid change with extensive building programmes undertaken recently as part of the Thames Gateway Regeneration. The area is ethnically diverse with just over 30% of families of White British heritage, 30% from the Bangladeshi community and the others represent Black African groups such as Somali and a variety of White European groups.

The centre was designated as a phase one centre in February 2006. It provides a full range of services for its designation and is the main hub for health and family services for the area. As well as at Overland, services are also provided at Olga Children's Centre, Victoria Park and, over the year, at a variety of other locations in the area. The centre is managed by the local authority and is open 51 weeks a year for nine and a half hours a day. It has specialist provision offering six full- and six part-time places for hearing impaired young children which is used by Tower Hamlets and Hackney. It is co-located with a daycare nursery, offering full-time places for up to 40 children aged 18 months to five years. Children arrive at the centre with levels of skills, knowledge and abilities which are generally well below those expected for their ages. The nursery was not part of this inspection and was inspected separately in June 2011. The centre is currently merging with Olga

Children's Centre and there have been several changes to senior management in the last year. The centre leader has been in post for just over one month.

## 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

Overland is a good children's centre. The merging of Overland and Olga Children's Centres is being managed well and, although recent, the changes are resulting in strengthened leadership, communication, cooperation and focus so that services across the centres are improving.

The centre is highly regarded by the people who use it and this is not surprising because it offers outstanding care, guidance and support to its children and families. Parents say that the friendly atmosphere helps them and their children to relax, learn and develop together. There are high levels of trust so that parents and carers have confidence in sharing sensitive information, therefore support is able to be more effectively targeted. For many families, the centre and its staff have provided real support in times of difficulty. One parent commented that such support had 'saved her'.

Equality of access and diversity are central to the ethos of the centre, evident in its policies and in day-to-day life. Staff reflect the diversity of the local community and this contributes to the welcome and feeling of inclusion. There is a good understanding of hearing impairment and, as a result, children with this disability are fully included and make good progress. Parents, carers and children welcome the opportunity to mix with, find out about and become friends with, people from different cultures and backgrounds and this makes an important contribution to community cohesion. While the centre can demonstrate that it is reaching out to increasing numbers of families, the recording systems are such that it is not possible to identify groups and trends in the white population other than White British.

The centre takes good account of the needs of children and families and plans its provision accordingly. For example, in response to the shortage of play spaces and

relatively high occurrence of overcrowded households in the local area, there is a good range of opportunities for outdoor play and physical activities. Some of these, such as the climb, run and have fun groups, are provided in larger spaces, such as a local church hall or community centre, and this underlines the effectiveness of the partnerships with private and voluntary groups. Good communication with health and speech and language colleagues informs the provision of particular activities, for example the Boom Bang Bees group helps children develop their communication, language and learning skills.

Specific needs are highlighted through outreach work, observations during centre sessions, parental feedback and through referrals from partners. Support is tailored to meet these needs, for example courses to help parents learn how to manage their children's behaviour more effectively are well attended. Feedback shows that these have a significant impact in enabling parents to understand their own behaviour and manage their children's behaviour better. One parent commented that 'her son had become a lot more sociable since attending sessions and they have formed a loving relationship'.

Centre staff are proactive in engaging families and helping them acquire the confidence and skills to achieve qualifications, particularly in English for the many who speak other languages, access volunteering and ultimately employment opportunities. This work is enhanced by close liaison with Jobcentre plus colleagues.

Partnerships are very strong with good systems of collaboration and communication so that the support provided to individual families is helpful rather than overwhelming. Key to this is the family support team whose outreach work is highly effective in assessing needs, providing and planning support for individual families. This work is enhanced by well-coordinated liaison with the centre's play and learning team and strong partnerships with colleagues such as local midwives, health visitors, educational psychologists and social workers. Thus the centre accesses a wide range of valuable expertise and regular joint working is enhancing the skills of centre staff.

Although partnerships are very strong on the ground, at a more strategic level, the involvement and impact of partnerships are not quite so effective at the moment. The partnership advisory board systems are currently under review by the local authority and a revised structure for this layer of governance and accountability due to come into effect in the autumn. In the meantime, the local authority is providing enhanced leadership and management support and challenge.

Senior leaders have quickly established a strong sense of cohesion and clarity of purpose. They are working on plans for further improvement and are aware that, although current improvement plans identify appropriate activities to address priorities and meet needs, they are not based on sufficiently rigorous and detailed analysis of data or feedback. The current systems clearly demonstrate that the lives of individual children and families are improved by the work of the centre. However, the analysis of information and data is not rigorous enough so that the impact on outcomes for groups, or as a result of particular provision, is not fully evaluated or

measured. In some instances, the provision of data is not as timely or focused as necessary. Nevertheless, the centre has had a demonstrable impact on the lives of children and their families for several years. This successful track record and the current forward momentum show that the centre has good capacity to improve.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Ensure that strategic planning is based on rigorous analysis and evaluation of feedback and data and identifies clear targets to measure success and demonstrate the impact of services on different groups of users.
- Work with key partners to improve further the sharing of information and data in order to enhance evaluation and targeting of support.
- Improve the systems for recording ethnicity so that the needs of all groups can be better identified and supported.

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

<b>2</b>
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Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage get along well together, play safely and enjoy the well-planned activities on offer in the various groups. Their parents and carers also enjoy the opportunities to meet socially, find out about the different resources on offer and play with their children.

The children particularly enjoy spending time outside in the outdoor play areas and in the garden. Clear routines help the children to feel secure and they move freely with confidence between activities making choices and developing independence. Learning British sign language is supporting the progress and independence of the group of young hearing impaired children. The play and learning team is trained to focus on, and enhance, communication and this approach is evident in the quality of the discussions between adults and children in the sessions. Leaders make sure that parents have every opportunity to understand how and why children play in different ways, for example why messy play is important.

Children are beginning to learn how to stay healthy through the emphasis on physical exercise, careful attention to hygiene and the healthy snacks which are provided. Parents are also involved in learning about the importance of exercise, diet, dental health and through specific sessions, some of which they request, such as one on food hygiene. Regular visits from a breastfeeding councillor enable mothers to share concerns and get advice in an informal way. A strong focus across the borough on encouraging breastfeeding has resulted in an increase of 25% since 2008/9 in the numbers of mothers maintaining breastfeeding at six to eight weeks.

Other courses to support parents include baby massage and one mother commented that, due to the skills she learned on this course, her baby was relaxed and sleeping

better. The feedback from these sessions is positive with most parents saying that they have a greater understanding as a result of attending. Family support workers discuss healthy eating during their outreach visits and their home safety assessments result in raised awareness and a number of homes being fitted with safety equipment such as stair gates and smoke alarms. This work was done in response to the higher than average number of attendances at local accident and emergency departments. However, no data are currently available to enable the centre to evaluate the impact of their work in this area.

The centre works very effectively with partners such as social services, psychologists and health colleagues, and the quality of the targeted support and early intervention ensures that children, including those subject to the Common Assessment procedures, results in improved outcomes for children and families.

Parents and carers feel that they are really listened to and that their views are fully taken into account. The Parents Forum happens more regularly now. It includes representation from a range of groups and helps to shape the activities and plans of the centre. Parents contribute ideas and influence activities such as planning the summer programme of visits and picnics. Parents appreciate the regular contact with other parents and also the opportunities to share their own skills, such as food from different cultures at the recent street party or a session provided by one parent on using Wii fit.

Learning English is a high priority and many parents have successfully attended the regular English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses. The effective work of the community development officer, along with close liaison with a Jobcentre plus colleague, engages parents and supports them to build skills and confidence, access training and increase their chances of gaining employment. About a third of parents and carers are currently being supported in this way and there is good evidence to show successes in this area.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in 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 and employment</b>	<b>2</b>

## How good is the provision?

2
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The centre is very welcoming and buzzes with activity throughout the day. The rooms are enhanced by attractive displays celebrating children's art work. There are a good range of group activities in the centre and also at other venues, such as the one o'clock club in the local park. The popularity of these is evident from the high numbers who attend and the waiting lists. Sessions are well planned and there are plenty of opportunities for children of different ages to engage in interesting and enjoyable learning both inside and out. Staff make good use of observations of individuals and sessions to amend and inform their planning. The prominent displays of Early Years Foundation Stage aspects and themes in all the spaces support the understanding of parents and carers. The centre provides the only provision for hearing impaired young children in Tower Hamlets and Hackney and all staff have received appropriate training so that these children are fully integrated and well supported.

There are many examples of parents and carers accessing support and advice to develop their parenting skills, increase their own learning, development and employability. This support is often very personalised, for example key workers will accompany parents to colleges to support them in making the right choices.

The centre's number one priority is to ensure that it meets the needs and ensures the safety and welfare of children, particularly the more vulnerable members of the community. The close liaison with midwives, health visitors and centre staff ensures that most of the new babies in the local area are known to the centre. Health colleagues often register families and refer particular families to the family support team. This team is instrumental in assessing the needs of individuals and families through initial and subsequent home visits. The quality of records, observations and follow-up activity is very good and well linked to excellent systems for coordination and communication. This is enhanced by good inter-agency working with partners such as a social worker, educational psychologist and speech and language therapist. This joint working is strengthened by mutual respect for each other's expertise and also provides on-the-job training for family support workers so that they are better able to evaluate and support parents at an early stage.

The centre responds to the needs of users and there are many examples of provision specifically targeted to meet identified needs in the local community. For example, information about high levels of depression in adults resulted in the provision of a targeted Raising Happy Babies course. Feedback from younger parents showed that some lacked the confidence to join in with centre activities. So, specific sessions were provided for this group and they were accompanied into Stay and Play sessions until they were confident to attend on their own. The Community Development Grant has been well used to identify and engage some of the more hard to reach groups, who were not accessing the centre, and increase their involvement. The evidence is clear that this work is having a significant, positive impact on the lives of the families



involved. There are many individual instances where support has been provided in times of real difficulty, such as delivering food vouchers or helping to sort out housing difficulties. As a result of attending meetings in local schools, family support workers were able to arrange transport in order that an older child could attend school regularly. Parents confirm that this sort of support transforms 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>1</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**2**

The community leader and the other senior leaders have quickly established themselves in their new roles. The quality of provision is rigorously monitored and the centre takes account of the views of parents and carers using their feedback to improve and amend planning for the next sessions. Recent changes as a result of the amalgamation of support services between Olga and Overland are making a significant difference to the effectiveness and stability of the Parents Forum. Parents are rightly confident that their views are important and are acted on. Staff are well qualified and allocated according to identified needs, space is well organised and used flexibly to accommodate different partners and this contributes to good value for money.

The strong emphasis on safety and well-being is reflected in robust, well-documented routines and publicised information to ensure the safeguarding of children, families and staff. For example, information about child protection is evident in all rooms with contact people and phone numbers. All staff receive appropriate training on child protection and safeguarding including wider issues such as immunisation and domestic violence. Health and safety records are fully up to date, as are accident records which show that the incidence of accidents is low and decreasing.

Everyone is included and treated with respect regardless of differences and individual needs. Access to learning and personal development is well resourced and effectively managed for all children, including those with hearing impairment. There is careful analysis of which groups are over and under represented and amendments to services to enable greater targeting and involvement of disadvantaged groups,

although this is somewhat limited by a lack of information about White non-British groups. There are examples of where difficult decisions have been made to ensure that the target families are better provided for.

The local authority systems of management and accountability are clear and the use of children's centre improvement partners provides a good level of challenge and support. The systems of governance of children's centres across the borough are undergoing significant change, including at Partnership Advisory board level. In this period between the dismantling of the previous system and the establishment of a new one, the ability of key partners to influence, evaluate and shape direction is limited. On the ground, however, close partnership working and good communication is having a considerable positive impact on the outcomes for families. There are close and effective partnerships with a wide range of services and these are very well integrated to ensure that they are providing coherent support.

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>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>2</b>

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

The inspection of the Overland Nursery which took place on 13 June 2011.

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Overland centre on 26 and 27 July 2011. We judged the centre as good.

Overland is a good children's centre. Thank you for contributing to this inspection. Those of you we spoke to and the examples of parents and carers feedback we looked at gave us very valuable information about the work and impact of the centre.

All the comments we heard and saw in feedback from parents and carers were very positive and this is, to a great extent, because of the outstanding care, guidance and support the centre offers to its children and families. The caring, friendly atmosphere helps families to do well and there are high levels of trust between yourselves and staff so that you have the confidence to open up about sometimes quite difficult problems. This is important because it means that the support can be adapted so that it is better planned and focused on meeting the particular needs of individual children and families. All of the different partners, such as health visitors and social workers, work very closely with the centre teams so that the support given to families who need it the most is carefully planned and they are not overwhelmed with support coming at them from lots of different directions. The centre believes that the right support at the earliest opportunity means that often problems are resolved at an early stage.

Children's safety and well-being are paramount and the policies and every day practice show this to be the case. The centre is a safe and welcoming place which includes everyone regardless of background, cultural heritage or individual needs. This is helped by the staff who themselves reflect the diversity of the local area. You and your children welcome the opportunities to mix with, find out about and become friends with people from different cultures and backgrounds. However, while the centre knows about its main different groups, the recording systems are not good enough to enable them to identify groups and trends in the White population other than White British.

The range and quality of services and activities makes a positive difference to the lives of children and families. The centre plans its activities carefully so that they meet your needs. For example, Bow is a busy part of London with a shortage of play spaces and some overcrowded households, so the centre plans many of the activities so that children have the chance to play outdoors. It is also why groups like Climb,

Run and Have Fun are set up so that children can have the chance to take part in physical activities. You told me that you would welcome more of this sort of groups.

The centre makes good use of information which is passed between agencies. For example, speech and language colleagues highlighted that many children had difficulties with speaking and communication, so the Boom Bang Bees group focuses on activities which help children develop their communication, language and learning skills, as well as having fun. In all the groups and activities, staff rightly emphasis how important different kinds of play are. They demonstrate what they mean in practice so that you are able to try out different activities with your children.

As well as health and welfare support services, you also appreciate the different courses and sessions such as the training to help you manage your child's behaviour better, or baby massage sessions which one parent said helped her baby to relax and sleep better. Many of you also take advantage of the support to help you gain qualifications, find volunteering opportunities, sort out benefits and eventually help you into employment.

The Parents Forum is happening more regularly and this gives you the opportunity to contribute ideas as to how the centre can improve in the future. Day to day working relationships between partners are good but, at the moment, the impact and influence of the partnership advisory board are less effective. The local authority has reviewed how partnership advisory boards work and there will be new systems in place in the autumn.

Despite the recent changes, the senior leaders have quickly established high expectations and a strong sense of purpose. The merging of the Olga and Overland teams has strengthened leadership and team working. They are working on plans for further improvement and are aware that more needs to be done to get a much sharper picture of what impact the centre is having on improving outcomes. We have asked them to improve the rigour of their self-evaluation, analysis of data and feedback and also that they make sure they set clear targets for success which can be measured. Sometimes the information they need to measure success or set targets is held by one of the partners and we have asked that partners and the centre work together to make sure that the centre has the right information at the right time.

Finally, the work of Overland has had a positive impact on the lives of children and their families for several years. This successful track record and the current forward momentum show that the centre has good capacity to improve.

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