

Inspection report for Harmony Children's Centre

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Local authority | Brent |
| Inspection number | 367808 |
| Inspection dates | 27–28 July 2011 |
| Reporting inspector | Linda Killman HMI |

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Centre governance | The local authority |
| Centre leader | Val Joseph |
| Date of previous inspection | First inspection |
| Centre address | 38 Bridge Road, Neasden, London NW10 0BX |
| | |
| Telephone number | 020 8451 4180 |
| Fax number | 020 8937 1989 |
| Email address | harmonycc@brent.gov.uk |

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Linked school if applicable | Mitchell Brook Primary School 101524 |
| Linked early years and childcare, if applicable | Harmony Children's Centre EY393928 |

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: August 2011



Corporate member of
Plain English Campaign
Committed to clearer communication

361

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100024.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 100024

© Crown copyright 2011



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 centre manager and other staff, parents and carers, representatives from the local authority, health care professionals, advisers of partner services, and representatives from the locality advisory board.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation information, its plan for improvement, health and safety records, case studies and data.

Inspection judgements

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

Information about the centre

Harmony Children's Centre is a phase one purpose-built children's centre. Its reach area is one of high deprivation and unemployment within the 30% most disadvantaged areas in Brent. Cases of child poverty and the proportions of families on benefits and/or living in unsuitable or overcrowded housing are high. The levels of children's skills on entry to early years provision are well below expectations. The area is a long-established Black African and Afro-Caribbean community. This is changing rapidly with a rising mixed migrant population including new arrivals from countries in Eastern Europe, refugees and asylum seekers. Its reach area includes a site nearby for Traveller families.

The centre provides registered childcare for children aged from three months to four years. This provision was inspected separately in November 2009. The centre provides all of the required elements of the universal offer including education, care and family services. The local authority restructured early years provision in Brent in April 2011. As a result, there have been a number of significant changes including arrangements for governance and reductions in staffing, funding and some key services. All staff are employees of Brent Council with line management provided by the centre manager who works across St Raphael's and Harmony children's centres and is accountable to the Preventative Services Locality Manager. With the exception of the childcare team, all staff work between both centres. The majority of children accessing the centre transfer to local nurseries and/or one of five local primary schools including Mitchell Brook Primary School.

Centre governance has very recently changed from a management board to a locality advisory board and locality parents' forum. The advisory board provides advice and assistance to ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the children's centre. It is made up of representatives from centre staff, providers of key services including health and education, parents, carers, other members of the community, and Brent Council.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

3

Main findings

Harmony is a satisfactory children's centre. It is an inclusive, welcoming place described by one health professional as a 'haven of calm and tranquillity' for its diverse community. Parents come to a 'safe and supportive' environment to receive good quality care, guidance and support. Comments from users such as 'people are so helpful' are typical. As one parent reflected, 'It gives me a reason to get up sometimes.' Some aspects of the centre's work are good. Arrangements for safeguarding and child protection are effective and have a high priority. The centre's governance has recently moved seamlessly from an effective management board to an advisory board. User engagement is good as a result of good quality outreach work and the high level of parental involvement in shaping the centre's future. Equality and diversity are promoted strongly and discrimination is tackled earnestly. Even so, the centre's overall effectiveness at this point is satisfactory rather than good. This is because it is unable to demonstrate convincingly the impact of its work on outcomes for children and families. In addition, changes following recent restructuring of early years provision in Brent have presented the centre with considerable challenges to overcome and these are not yet resolved fully.

During this turbulent period, the management team has secured high staff morale and strong team work that contribute to the smooth running of the centre on a daily basis. In effect, the centre's staffing has been reduced by half and this has had a considerable impact on leadership and management and provision. Leadership and management are too dependent upon the part-time centre manager who is working between two children's centres. The local authority has stepped in to provide additional support during this period of transition; future sustainability of this level of support is insecure. At the same time partner services such as health are undergoing restructuring so some services that were previously available are no longer. The frequency of some popular, well-attended activities such as 'Stay and Play' has been reduced and a few parents do not understand the underlying reasons for reductions in the centre's provision.

In response to the cuts, the centre is looking at ways to reshape and rekindle some of its provision which has tailed off, is on hold or ceased since April. The centre's leadership team is acutely aware that its families' needs remain unchanged and has wisely invested time in developing a satisfactory plan of action. Former provision such as the fathers' group and regular access to Jobcentre Plus has dwindled. Adequate plans are in place to resume services imminently.

The centre acknowledges its weakness in evaluating the impact of its provision on outcomes for families over time. Impressive work is already underway to ensure that data are now accurate. The centre knows who its most vulnerable groups are and data show a good level of engagement of different groups within its reach area. The involvement of parents and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities is the exception; evidence of this group accessing provision is sparse. Children's achievement through the Early Years Foundation Stage is not tracked and recorded with sufficient precision and rigour with contributions from parents. The nursery does not receive details of assessments and records of children's involvement with other agencies to plan next steps to meet their learning and development needs. However, the centre is able to demonstrate a satisfactory record of helping adults to navigate their way through the services ensuring that they receive their full entitlement to benefits and in signposting them towards employment, education and/or training thus reducing child poverty in the area.

The local authority is providing a clear steer on its vision for the centre's future and its expectations for performance. A performance management structure is now in place. Staff and the locality advisory board understand their roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability. Key training has been delivered for safeguarding, attachment, well-being, child development, database and finance. An annual conversation with the centre which is focused strongly on outcomes is underway. The energy with which challenges are currently being tackled and the fact that the large majority of families within the centre's reach area access services at the centre during this period of uncertainty are indicative of its satisfactory capacity to sustain improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop robust systems for measuring and evaluating the impact of provision on outcomes for children and families.
- Accelerate children's progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
 - keeping accurate and detailed records of their achievement
 - using assessment information to inform and adapt future provision to meet their needs
 - ensuring that information about children's learning and development includes contributions from centre staff, parents and, if appropriate, other agencies.
- Increase the level of engagement of children and families who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Ensure that the local authority secures a sustainable structure for the centre's leadership and management.

How good are outcomes for users?

| |
|----------|
| 3 |
|----------|

The centre does not evaluate outcomes for the reach area that it serves well enough to provide unequivocal evidence of improvement. However, through direct observations of activities, scrutiny of case studies and discussions with staff, partner agencies, parents and carers, inspectors were able to gather sufficient evidence to support the judgement that outcomes are satisfactory. Parents and children make satisfactory progress in developing skills for the future.

Premises are very safe and secure so children, families and staff feel at ease. Families who are potentially most vulnerable are identified quickly; referral systems work smoothly so that children and families access support and services in good time. Staff use confidently, if appropriate, the Common Assessment Framework to improve the safeguarding of children. The centre's support for parents to improve all aspects of the health and well-being of their children is variable since the cutbacks but nonetheless satisfactory. Good promotion of healthy eating helps children to learn about and sample healthy foods by growing, harvesting and preparing fruit and vegetables grown in the centre's garden. Mothers are confident and relaxed about breastfeeding their babies at the centre. Children visibly enjoy the activities they participate in. Parents and children play and have fun together. Adults report how much they enjoy visiting the centre because it enables them to socialise and overcome feelings of isolation.

Across Brent the proportion of children gaining a good level of development for five-year-olds is rising. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest is narrowing. However, because the centre does not track children's progress through to the end of the Reception Year it is unable to demonstrate its contribution to these figures. Relationships are good at all levels. Children behave well. There is a good level of involvement of parents through the locality parents' forum and the advisory

board to ensure that their views are put forward and that their suggestions are considered. A group of parents attending a parenting programme spanning a nine month period produced their own high-quality booklet 'The Magic of Parenting' to pass on valuable information and guidance to others.

The centre has an established role in the community. Children, families and staff interact with respect for diversity. As a result, community cohesion is developing well even when pockets of disturbance or unrest bubble to the surface in parts of the community. Families draw upon services readily to help them to improve their economic stability or independence and a small proportion take up opportunities to progress to training and adult education programmes especially, for example, to learn to speak English as an additional language.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles | 3 |
| The extent to which children are safe and protected, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them | 2 |
| The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development | 3 |
| The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre | 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 | 3 |

How good is the provision?

3

Very effective outreach work and face-to-face discussions with families ensure that provision is matched well to families' needs. Timings of activities are considered thoughtfully. Where provision is arranged jointly with other centres, locations and ease of access are of prime consideration. However, the range of services, activities and opportunities for users is limited temporarily while well-considered plans are put in place to cover the gaps caused by restructuring arrangements. Most groups are benefiting from the centre's services so that the core offer is being met. The centre directs adults and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities to specialist provision available in other parts of Brent. However, given the easy access to the centre for families in the immediate vicinity, too few are taking up the opportunity to use the centre.

Family assessments following referrals from health and other services are thorough and bespoke packages of support are tailored to need. Good-quality family support work is pivotal in the process and case studies show that appropriate provision

makes a discernable difference to some families. Ongoing assessment of children accessing activities at the centre is insufficiently thorough because a robust system for regularly recording progress about their learning and development is not in place. Parents are involved fully in a good range of activities with their children including 'Stay and play', 'Helping Hands' and 'Time for Rhyme', but staff sometimes miss opportunities to show them how to develop their children's learning through modelling and questioning.

Childminders access activities freely to develop their practice. The early years teacher models good practice, basing learning on the children's interests which the childminders emulate. Childminders borrow resources such as sensory toys which are particularly appropriate for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The centre is particularly proficient at encouraging service partners to take part in sessions so that they are able to talk to parents informally about what they provide. For example, the health visitor visits baby yoga and baby massage sessions to talk about breastfeeding, diet and nutrition. In times of crisis families feel well supported by the centre. Take up for appointments with the Citizen's Advice Bureau is high; its regular presence in the centre makes it easily accessible, especially to families who would otherwise have to queue with young children at the main office. Wait time is excellent, with 95% of users waiting less than half an hour. In its last inspection, the quality of childcare in the nursery was judged good.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users | 3 |
| The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users | 3 |
| The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community | 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?

3

The centre is undergoing a period of profound change. Impressively, governance and accountability arrangements are clear. The local authority provides a clear steer for the centre and communicates explicit expectations and targets for improvement. All partners and staff understand their roles and responsibilities. Parents' views are taken into account fully. The centre's priorities and targets for improvement currently focus on what is provided rather than on the difference it is making. Success criteria are not precise enough to be measurable and demonstrate that the centre's performance is improving. The locality advisory board benefits from the transfer across of some representatives from the former management board. New members and established members alike are confident in asking pertinent questions and holding the centre to account. All are committed to the centre's work and are

ambitious to maintain quality services against a backdrop of diminishing resources. All statutory requirements are met. The centre's safeguarding arrangements and procedures for vetting staff and volunteers are good. The centre responds swiftly and effectively to support parents and their children experiencing domestic violence. Protocols and practice for making referrals and sharing information between agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children, and where applicable vulnerable adults, are very effective. All staff receive regular training to keep them up to date with the latest requirements for child protection and safeguarding. Any incidents involving staff or families whilst on the premises are reported to the advisory board so that steps can be taken to minimise risk in the future.

Leadership and management are too dependent upon the centre manager, an experienced professional, new to Harmony on a part-time basis. Responsibilities are not shared equitably. The local authority has stepped in beyond its remit to support the centre during this period of transition and to fill a gap resulting from staff absence, but this is not sustainable in the long term. Other staff are working diligently to fulfil their new roles. But, while they adjust to them, the centre manager is leading on almost all aspects of the centre's work; responsibility is not dispersed equitably.

Promoting equality and celebrating diversity lies at the heart of the centre's work. All families are treated equally and with respect. Those people hardest to reach and engage with are the centre's biggest challenge, but staff understand their circumstances and work hard to engage with them. Occasionally incidents in the locality affect particular groups or families who then lose trust or confidence in some services. Nonetheless, the centre continues to reach out and endeavours to re-engage with them. Parents with mental health issues receive good multi-disciplinary support, helping them to manage their disabilities better or to access activities where they and their children are able to mix with others. The centre knows that there is more work to do to find ways of engaging with children and families who have learning difficulties and or physical disabilities.

Accommodation is suitable and the environment is safe. The use of resources is leading to satisfactory outcomes. The centre is working hard to sustain quality provision during a difficult period of change. It contributes to developing and implementing partnership activities. Some of these are established and effective, such the childminders group and the Citizens Advice Bureau; others are not fully engaged until arrangements are finalised under the restructuring arrangements. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| 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 | 3 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| community | |
| The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community | 3 |
| The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties | 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 | 3 |
| The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide | 3 |
| The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision | 2 |

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

The inspection report for early years childcare provision at Harmony Children's Centre inspected on 6 November 2009.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance *Complaining about inspections*, which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected Harmony Children's Centre on 27 and 28 July 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Like you, we were greeted with a warm welcome when we arrived at the centre and found staff very communicative and helpful. The centre promotes equality and diversity well. Everyone is included, treated with the utmost respect and able to access all that the centre provides. We gathered evidence to confirm that most of you are very satisfied with the service you receive. However, there have been a number of changes to the activity programme recently and some of you told us that you felt that the quality of provision is not quite as good as it used to be. This is because Brent Council has changed its structure for early years provision resulting in significant cutbacks. Be assured that the locality parents' forum is very good at making sure that your views are heard by the advisory board.

Despite reductions in staffing and funding the centre's leadership and management are working hard to secure the quality of provision. We found that the leadership and management are too reliant upon one part-time centre manager to ensure that it is sustainable in the future. We have asked the local authority to secure a long-term, effective structure. Some activities and services have fizzled out in recent weeks but a secure plan is in place to get them up and running again in the near future, albeit in a slightly different form. We found that that very few parents and children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are using the centre so we have asked the centre to think of ways to encourage more to come along and join in. One thing is certain – the centre puts your children's safety first and none of the changes have affected its good arrangements for safeguarding.

We were particularly impressed by how well the centre staff work together to ensure that you receive the right support and advice quickly. The quality of care, guidance and support that you get is good. Services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and good family support work have helped many of you to access benefits that you are entitled to so that your families are better off financially.

The centre is always seeking to improve its provision for you. It is there to give you easy access to education, care and family services. These are provided to improve the well-being of your children. The centre has not been checking well enough to see that what it provides really makes a difference to you and your children's lives. We have asked the leadership team to make sure that it does so in future. We also found that your children's progress and development are not being recorded well enough so that the nursery or any other pre-school that your children may move to knows exactly the stage they are at when they arrive.

It was a pleasure to meet some of you during the inspection. We hope that you, your children and many more parents and carers who live locally will continue to enjoy and benefit from all of the services available to you in the future. Thank you for contributing to our evidence base.

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