

Inspection report for Abbey Lane Children's Centre

Local authority	Newham
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	None
Linked early years and childcare	Smarty Pants @ Abbey Lane Children's Centre EY382324 Early Childhood Crèche at Abbey Lane EY416536

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 managers, staff, parents and carers, members of the advisory board and representatives of partner organisations. Inspectors observed the centre's work and talked to parents, carers, staff and children throughout the working days. They reviewed case studies and looked at a range of relevant documentation including evaluations completed by parents and carers.

Information about the centre

The centre is located in the Stratford area of East London. It was designated in February 2008 as a phase one Sure Start children's centre, serving an area that is among the 30% most deprived in the country. Since the reorganisation of children's centres in Newham within six early intervention areas in April 2011, the centre provides the full core offer of Sure Start services collaboratively with other centres and partners in the north-west locality area. Services include family support, play and learning sessions, access to specialist children's services, health and employment services, a crèche and access to integrated Early Years Foundation Stage childcare in a separate provision on site.

Activities and administration mainly take place in a modern, refurbished play and training building that is surrounded by a safely enclosed play area. It is managed directly by the London Borough of Newham and an advisory board involving parents is in place. The area manager is supported by a centre coordinator, two outreach workers, a senior family support worker and two part-time family support workers. Crèche and playworkers are employed sessionally from two different organisations. Between 15 and 20 staff and professionals from other agencies deliver services and activities for the centre.

The diversity of the population in the area is very high. It changes rapidly due to the high turnover of young families moving in and out of the area. Currently, the largest

ethnic groups in the local population are Black African, Bangladeshi and White European. More than 20 languages are spoken by the centre’s users and 80% speak English as an additional language. The majority of families in the area live in public or private-rented accommodation. A significant minority are asylum seekers or refugees. Nearly 40% of families with children under five face worklessness and receive benefits. Respiratory disease and nutrition issues are the predominant health problems for families. Children’s levels of skills and experiences when children come into the centre are lower than is typical for their age, especially in language development.

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

Abbey Lane Children’s Centre was well led and managed during the local authority’s reorganisation of children’s centre services. Managers have skilfully maintained the purpose and drive of the centre. Highly effective and established partnerships and good teamwork at all levels have sustained staff morale and enabled the centre to continue providing an outstandingly full programme. User satisfaction is high. Excellent relationships between statutory, private and voluntary partners are firmly established. Highly integrated and coherent early intervention services help the centre to safeguard families well. With the help of partnerships, the centre identifies and meets the needs of the community. The attendance of targeted groups, such as fathers, is increasing. Collaborative working with other centres and voluntary sector partners helps the centre to provide effectively for groups with specific needs, for example families suffering the effects of domestic violence and teenage parents. Working partnerships with the private daycare provider on site and with childminders secures good childcare provision and swift access to placements for children at risk of abuse.

The centre is recognised in the community as the gateway to a wide range of services for the many individuals and groups newly arrived in the area. Users have regular opportunities to be involved in shaping services and evaluating the effectiveness of provision through questionnaires and discussions with staff. As a

result, although the turnover of users reflects a constantly changing population, satisfaction is high.

Outcomes are good and there are real strengths in improving key aspects of families' health and well-being. One parent summed up a view that was often put to inspectors that, 'When we first moved here, the centre helped me make friends when I was at a low point in my life. I come here and I feel happy.'

The focus on inclusion of all potential users, including children and adults with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is strong. Play and learning activities are integrated for all children and parents appreciate the enjoyable opportunities that the centre provides. Children and adult learners acquire new skills and confidence. However, tracking of children's progress from their starting points to further help them achieve their full potential is limited to a few children on selected activities and managers do not have a clear overview of children's achievements. Not all parents become confident in helping their children with their learning.

The centre's accuracy in assessing its overall performance through a variety of measures is good. Managers have strengthened their capacity to understand the long-term impact on children's achievement through recent innovations in collecting and analysing data from schools. Services represent good value for money. The centre has maintained good performance throughout a demanding period of reorganisation. Although still in the process of implementing planned changes in locality arrangements, the centre has strong capacity to improve outcomes and provision further, based on what it has accomplished so far.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The centre managers should ensure that they identify the areas for development in the Early Years Foundation Stage for all children attending the centre's activities regularly, by:
 - keeping track of these children's progress, taking their starting points into consideration, and evaluating the progress of groups and individuals
 - ensuring that all play, care and learning practitioners explain children's development as fully as possible to parents and carers so that they are enabled to understand and help promote their children's learning and development.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The physical health of families using the centre improves strongly with regular attendance. Adults attending the centre make rapid improvements in their emotional well-being as they make friends and find ways to reduce the stresses of their lives together. Children in the daycare eat healthy snacks and meals. Families targeted for nutrition support 'healthy lifestyles', and 'cook and eat' helps them to sustain better

eating habits. Many families attending the centre enthusiastically embrace the healthy eating and exercise that are promoted in popular 'fit for fun' classes. A significant minority, however, is slow to change established lifestyles and does not take up healthy alternatives. The vast majority of mothers give their children an excellent start as they choose to breastfeed and do not smoke while pregnant. The uptake of child health checks is high. However, the rate of immunisations remains persistently low and, although dental health is targeted for improvement, many children under five need dental treatment.

Adults using the centre say that they feel safe and secure and they are able to share their concerns with staff. Information on most safety topics is woven into courses and 'stay and play' sessions, starting with antenatal classes, so that parents have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children safe. Parents learn how to keep themselves and their children safe while out and about by participating in outings. The centre works effectively with organisations, including Polish language and Asian and Black Women's support organisations, to raise awareness in different sectors of the community of how they can get help. Children are very well safeguarded through expert decision making and prompt referrals within the Every Child Matters multi-agency panels and the Common Assessment Framework processes.

Children attending the centre's community provision and daycare progress well from their starting points. The centre's evaluations show that children develop independence and curiosity and good attitudes to learning as they select materials and equipment for themselves and use the indoor and outdoor spaces to extend their learning. In targeted areas of deprivation, where young children are entering school with very low levels of skill and knowledge for their age, the centre supports exciting play sessions with natural and everyday objects that are having a measurably good impact on their achievement. Children and parents enjoy 'sing-along' and 'sign-along' sessions that focus on communication skills. Parents, including many with English as an additional language, grow in self-confidence, and social and parenting skills through attending 'Triple P' courses, 'super snackers' sessions and behaviour seminars. Although enjoyment of learning alongside their children in 'ready for school' and 'stay and play' is high, many parents acquire limited knowledge about children's learning and development and do not take part in discussions about how well their children are doing.

Families form sound relationships with the centre, encouraged by the caring attitudes of staff. Children and adults treat each other with respect. Parents show friendship which extends into the wider community. Some get together to organise out and about days and plan seminars of their choice. Parents learn to help their children behave sociably and well in play and recreation sessions as well as through structured behaviour courses. Parents are regularly asked to feedback their views to the centre and have representatives on the advisory board. The centre has been pivotal to the life of the local community for some while, for example through getting families involved in the design of the adjoining park. Families in the community continue to come together. However, consultation about the major restructuring of

children's centre services was cursory and few parents realise that far-reaching changes have been made.

Case studies point to a few striking examples of parents who have come on extraordinary journeys of personal development to get ready to find a job. The centre signposts parents effectively to an extensive network of training and adult education programmes and completion take-up rates are good. The centre uses the 'NEG2' funding for two-year-olds effectively to provide care and respite for the most vulnerable families, enabling parents to seek employment. The centre provides a direct link to Jobcentre Plus and the local Workplace agency. Working families access good-quality childcare in the private nursery on site or through the skilled childminders who attend the centre regularly and have achieved local 'high-performance' status awards. The centre is making the most of the Olympic and Paralympic opportunities for 2012 and employment in the Westfield shopping centre to open September 2011.

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	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	2
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre carries out a thorough assessment when a family first registers. Excellent communication and partnership work through the local Every Child Matters multi-agency resource panel ensures that individuals' welfare needs are well known to the centre. The centre's assessments link coherently with the Common Assessment Framework, child protection and children in need assessments. Information sharing to assess families' changing needs for wider services is routine and systematic. Some courses offered at the centre are accredited. In the best examples of activities that assess learners' progress as they go along, such as Triple P and nutritionists' courses, parents contribute to their own assessments. Play and care practitioners use observations of children's responses in their sessions to evaluate sessions broadly and plan engaging and enjoyable future activities. The centre does not, however, keep track of achievement for the children

attending most of the crèche or community provision and managers do not have an overview of how groups are doing. Children’s progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage is assessed routinely to help children do as well as they can in daycare at Smarty Pants and when they are cared for by local high-performing childminders.

The range of services offered is excellent and closely matches the needs of existing and potential groups of users in the community well. In a community where many families stay only for a short while, the centre’s network of partners enables the centre to get to know families’ needs rapidly and effectively. Partners are integral to the delivery of a full core offer and a wide variety of one-to-one support and group experiences. For example, the centre and midwives successfully include fathers-to-be; men greatly enjoy being involved the antenatal classes and coming to ‘Dads are doing it – DADI’ parenting classes. The richly-varied programme of activities has been maintained during the reorganisation. Further outreach sessions have been set up in an area of particular deprivation to stimulate children’s early learning through the senses and get these children off to a better start. The centre has sustained relationships with social care and health to ensure that the provision supports health and well-being and offers differing levels of support as users’ needs change. Outreach services are flexible, managed creatively and adapted to meet need. These secure high participation rates by the target groups of users.

Information, advice and guidance support is integral to all the centre’s activities. Families get the benefits and housing advice that they need and their economic stability improves. As resources have had to be closely managed through times of change in services, the centre has ensured that workers offer a range of skills. The centre’s own staff deliver baby massage, sing-along and sign-along sessions and home safety messages. In times of crisis families feel well supported by the centre as advice and support are organised on complex housing, health and social care matters. Families appreciate that the centre can find information on almost any family care issue from maternity to bereavement counselling.

Knowledgeable play and learning staff ensure that the activities are attractive and purposeful. Sessions such as the art course are planned well to be welcoming and accessible to a range of families’ needs so that all feel included. As a result, existing users spread the word and attendance is good. One parent said, ‘I learn so much. I told my cousin to come over, too. We wouldn’t miss a week of it.’ Staff build on the achievements of parents and carers so that regular attendees develop good self-esteem and confidence in their parenting skills. Although not formally assessed, children’s achievements are celebrated through displays of their work and photographs of children which inspire others to do well.

These are the grades for the quality of provision.

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

development and enjoyment for all users	
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leaders and managers have achieved a great deal in a short space of time to ensure continuous accountability. Well understood governance arrangements remain in place. Protocols for joint working with partners have been updated. The delivery plan is clearly linked to early intervention strategies and aims to increase the economic resilience of families. Services have been maintained so that the majority of users have feedback to the centre that they have experienced very little change for themselves. Line management arrangements build on the effective quadrant meetings that were already working well. Supervision by appropriate professionals ensures that the quality of work has been maintained.

Data are effectively shared by partners to help the centre understand what is needed in the area. The centre gathers its own data from registrations and attendance to ensure that its view of priorities is up to date. The centre reviews its self-evaluation regularly, taking account of evaluation reports from partners, sophisticated data from health and social care and its own increasingly complex analysis. From this the centre has a good idea of its strengths and areas for development and has put further measures, such as additional support in the Carpenters Lane area, into effect. As a result, outcomes for most users are good and improving, and some are exceptionally strong.

The centre is kept safe and welcoming. Managers ensure that all safeguarding requirements for safe vetting and recruitment of staff and volunteers are in place. Safety and security are well managed and risk assessments are thorough. Partners give extensive support to the centre to implement the best possible safeguarding practice through information sharing and joint working and training to the centre.

The value for money provided by use of resources is high. Inclusion of all groups in the community is central to the centre's purpose and its work with partners. Space is used intensively and is fully accessible for children and adults with physical and mobility disabilities. All legal requirements for assessing the impact of services are met. Effective resource planning, which includes deployment of staff in line with their skills, takes account of the need to develop sustainable services. Financial controls are good. Staff exchange work sessions with other centres. For example, outreach workers deliver baby massage elsewhere in return for a worker planning baby yoga for the centre with good impact on the emotional wellbeing of families in the area.

Resilient partnerships are in place. Managers have worked effectively to ensure that what the centre offers is understood widely in the community and that all families,

no matter what their background or circumstances, are attracted to use the services. Double the numbers of male carers are attending activities since the previous year. The centre has strategies in place to ensure the inclusion of asylum seekers and other groups that have no access to services in the community. Centres in the locality area take the lead in their areas of expertise, such as provision for deaf parents and Polish-speaking parents, which has a highly positive impact on inclusion for those groups.

The centre maintains consistent and productive partnerships with users, resulting in strong levels of satisfaction and engagement with the centre's work. Services regularly ask users for their views and ensure that these are used to inform decisions. Good examples are the provision of 'Dads are doing it- DADI days' in line with male carers' needs and the timing of stay and play activities in the weekly schedule to suit most users.

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 community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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

An inspection of the registered Early Years Foundation Stage and registered childcare

provision linked to the centre was carried out in May 2010, under Section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The outcome was good. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Abbey Lane Children's Centre on 17 and 18 August 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all the parents and carers who spoke to us during the inspection. Thank you very much to the parents who came in to see us on days when they do not normally come to the centre.

Here is a short report of what we found.

The managers and staff at Abbey Lane Children's Centre have worked well to make sure that they provide an exceptionally wide range of activities and specialist support for those of you that attend already and those who could attend in the future. Although many families only stay in the area for a short while, all families quickly feel welcome and included at the centre. People from all backgrounds, no matter what their language or whether they are a mother, father or extended family receive a warm welcome and find it enjoyable to be at the centre.

People make friends at the centre and groups often work together to cope with stresses or solve problems in their lives. One parent summed up a view that was often put to inspectors, 'When we first moved here the centre helped me make friends when I was at a low point in my life. I come here and I feel happy.' You feel safe and you are kept safe and secure at the centre.

Families attending are helped to stay in good health. Some families learn to take up healthy eating and exercise. However, more parents can help themselves and their children by adopting healthy lifestyles.

We were very pleased to see how much all members of the family enjoy messy play, sing-along, 'fit for fun' and especially the 'ready for school' group. Attendance is good and the number of fathers attending some groups has increased well in the last year. Some parents say that they learn a lot about the skills for being a parent, like feeding and weaning. Some of you want to learn specific words so that you can discuss how your children learn and develop. We have asked the centre to give you more information if you want to learn alongside your child.

Children learn how to be sociable, and learn to help themselves when they are playing. Most children are well prepared for starting school.

We found that the staff are very skilled and knowledgeable about the care and education of young children. We see that they observe children's progress carefully as they learn from being in the crèche, or at stay and play, or even when out and about with staff from the centre. We have asked the centre to do even more to keep track of how well children who attend regularly are doing and give extra help if necessary.

The centre works extremely well alongside other organisations such as Smarty Pants Nursery, health visitors, midwives, nutritionists and social worker, particularly when a family has a very serious problem.

The centre's own workers often give you the information, advice and guidance you need to help you find courses, or get counselling for money problems or housing. Managers ask for your views regularly and most of you do contribute your ideas. Some regular users represent parents on the Advisory Board and some put forward good ideas for days out or who to invite as a guest speaker.

The quality of work that the centre does is good and the centre makes sure that the outcomes for families that attend are good. The day-to-day management and the strategies for development in the future are good. The centre gives good value for money and has the capacity to go on developing well.

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