

Inspection report for Stroud Green Children's Centre

Local authority	Haringey
Inspection number	365857
Inspection dates	13–14 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Lynda Welham

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Pauline McLoughlin
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Woodstock Road (Perth Road entrance) Stroud Green London N4 3EX
Telephone number	020 7272 4539
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	childrenscentre@stroudgreen.haringey.sch.uk

Linked school if applicable	Stroud Green Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Stroud Green Children's Centre

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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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

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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.

An inspection of the maintained nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of Stroud Green Primary School under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

The childcare provision was not inspected as part of this inspection but will receive a separate inspection under section 49 of the Childcare act 2006.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre lead person, who is the headteacher of Stroud Green Primary School, staff based at the centre who work directly with children and families, representatives from partner agencies, two officers from the local authority, parents who use the centre and members of the governing body of the children's centre. Both the centre manager and deputy manager were absent during the inspection, as were both outreach workers.

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

INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENTRE

Stroud Green Children's Centre is situated in the west of Haringey and on the border with Islington and Hackney. As well as the on-site primary school, there is an extended care and play facility, funded by the local authority. The centre offers 15 hours a week nursery provision for two-year-olds as part of a government funded initiative in the linked childcare provision which is based on site.

The centre provides the full core offer through on-site services and by signposting families to services delivered through other children's centres and linked providers. The centre was first designated in 2006. Its reach area includes areas with high levels of social need. The proportion of families who live in workless households is below the national and local authority averages, but high in relation to neighbouring wards. The proportion of lone parents in the reach area is much higher than the London average. The percentage of children in Nursery and Reception classes within the ward area who are eligible for free school meals is similar to the London average, but high for the network area and considerably higher than average in the primary school. The unemployment rate is lower than Haringey's average. Approximately 20% of households live in crowded conditions. Stroud Green has the highest council and housing association dwellings in the network area. The centre's reach area is a culturally and socio-economically diverse community, within which a wide range of languages is spoken. The largest group in the reach area of the centre is of White British origin and there is a high population of families from Black British/Black African backgrounds. The proportion of families from Turkish and Somalian backgrounds is increasing.

Most children enter early years provision with a much narrower range of skills and abilities than those typically expected for their age.

The local authority is currently involved in consultation with all the children's centres in Haringey regarding a major re-organisation of children's centres into clusters. The centre's governance is currently through the governing body of Stroud Green Primary School. At the time of inspection, the advisory board was at a very early stage of development.

Overall effectiveness

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

4

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

4

Main findings

Stroud Green Children’s Centre’s overall effectiveness is inadequate. The centre is not serving children and families in its reach area as well as it should. This is due to inconsistent leadership and management, a lack of focused action planning to improve outcomes and to reach priority groups in the centre’s area, as well as unclear accountability arrangements. These weaknesses, together with gaps in provision and the centre’s track record of not evaluating and demonstrating impact on outcomes, indicate that the centre has insufficient capacity to improve.

Essentially, the centre has suffered from a lack of sustained drive and direction. Its work has not been monitored and evaluated with sufficient rigour to identify priorities for improvement or to drive forward new developments. Leaders and managers have made too little use of the available data from the local authority, the centre’s own information and users’ views to plan and deliver services. Consequently, the centre has not identified key groups in the reach area who are insufficiently engaged with its services or taken action to ensure their needs are met.

Despite the difficult circumstances caused by staff absence and uncertainty about the reorganisation of children’s centres in the borough, front-line staff have offered some stability and continuity of provision. Their strong teamwork has enabled them to continue to provide services for children and families that are greatly appreciated. Overall, however, the centre cannot demonstrate that it is meeting the needs of the most vulnerable families in its reach area as the assessment of the needs of the community is incomplete. Parents and users who do access the centre find the staff friendly and supportive. Users spoke of staff being a good, solid team who really knew their families well. There are some examples of successful partnerships providing support for families, such as those with the midwifery service. However, partnerships with other agencies have weakened over the last year. The centre’s arrangements for keeping children safe and free from harm are satisfactory.

The free entitlement to childcare for two-year-olds enables early intervention to improve children’s early communication and language skills, as well as their personal development. There have been other successes, for example parenting courses and support for families in particularly vulnerable situations. Less successful is outreach

and development within the centre's reach area. For example, there are more children and families accessing services from outside the reach area than those who live within it. This is due in part to the centre's location and the number of families travelling to the primary school from outside the borough. However, staff have not been sufficiently proactive in engaging those not currently using the centre's services and therefore cannot demonstrate sufficient equality of opportunity for all groups.

Arrangements for holding the centre to account are insecure and ineffective. The local authority failed to carry out an annual review last year. In addition, performance management and professional supervision arrangements are inconsistent. The governing body is unclear about its role in overseeing the work of the centre and ensuring appropriate targets are set and monitored. The advisory board is also ineffective because the majority of its members no longer attend. It has failed to draw on the views of parents and users sufficiently and has not been able to make a strong enough contribution to driving improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

In order to improve outcomes for families in the centre's reach area, the local authority and the centre should:

- set clear strategic direction and priorities for improvement which focus on outcomes and which are based on accurate evaluation of current services and the needs of the reach area
- strengthen the role of the local authority and the advisory board in holding the centre to account and driving improvement
- ensure that parents' and users' views are taken into account when reviewing the impact of services and determining future provision
- make better use of the available data and information to identify, target and support the groups in the reach area, particularly key vulnerable groups who are not currently engaged
- align professional supervision and accountability to the centre's strategic priorities.

How good are outcomes for users?

4

There are some examples of improved outcomes for families who use the centre. Valuable opportunities are provided in sessions such as 'Stay and Play' for parents, carers and children to socialise and play together. One parent said these sessions helped her to feel less isolated. Children behave well during activities at the centre. They gain in confidence as they enjoy the challenging and exciting outdoor playground and the many activities on offer for group and individual play at these sessions. Parents and carers speak positively about the fun their children have at 'Movers and Shakers' and how this develops their child's language skills through singing. However, targeted vulnerable groups, such as workless families and lone and teenage parents, are not sufficiently provided for. Outreach to specific groups,

such as Turkish and Somalian families, is at a very early stage of development and has yet to have any measurable impact. The ante-natal clinics held in the centre are well attended and greatly appreciated by parents-to-be, who find centre staff supportive and welcoming. Take-up rates for post-natal services are poor, however, and there is a lack of engagement with other health services, such as health visitors and support groups for teenage or lone parents. Consequently, those who may benefit most are not accessing centre services. In addition, the centre has little information about childhood obesity and breastfeeding rates, and is therefore unable to demonstrate whether they are making any discernable difference to the health of young children.

Outcomes for the first cohort of children who have participated in the two-year-old pilot project show encouraging signs of improvement in areas of personal development and speech and language, from below average starting points. Despite some evidence to show that the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage profile and the rest reduced last year, over the last three years the profile scores have remained relatively static. Some parents and carers who participate in centre activities with their children report that they have a greater understanding of their children's needs. However, there are missed opportunities to increase parents' and carers' understanding of children's play and learning as training programmes are too infrequent.

The centre offers volunteer placements for parents and carers and good support for local childminders. As a result, a few childminders and parents have been supported in gaining accredited qualifications, contributing to their economic well-being. Overall, however, the centre does not have sufficient strategies in place to develop employment and training opportunities for its users which would lead to improved educational achievement and economic well-being, partly because partnerships with Jobcentre plus are weak. Parents and carers do not currently contribute to the governance of the centre as their views are not regularly sought and acted upon. In addition, the Parent Forum has lapsed and there is no user representation on the advisory board.

Staff are alert to safety concerns and make every effort to keep children safe from harm. Safeguarding training is provided for all staff and key staff are trained in supporting families where the Common Assessment Framework is used. The centre cooperates with other agencies, such as the community police, to reduce the risk of harm to children and families, raising awareness about crime prevention and road safety. Families have benefited from valuable advice on improving safety in the home, for example by attending first-aid courses.

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	4
The extent to which children are safe and protected, and their welfare	3

concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	4
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	4
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	4

How good is the provision?

4

Users' views are sought following activities at the centre and are generally positive, but these views are not analysed sufficiently to be used as a basis for change or improvement to the services offered. There is good partnership working with local childminders, who attend an off-site drop-in provision with the children in their care. The drop-in sessions are planned for and resourced with input from the centre's early years educator. As a result, the childminders' understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage is enhanced so that they can offer quality learning experiences in their own settings.

There are variable levels of participation in basic types of services. For example, the number of mothers attending the drop-in baby group has dwindled and the centre has not responded robustly enough to this challenge. Some information about the needs in the wider community comes from the outreach workers' links to groups in the locality, but the needs of different groups in the wider community are not always assessed systematically or linked to service development. Appropriate guidance and support are provided through leaflets and signposting to some specialist services in the locality. Noticeboards have a termly focus, such as informing parents and carers seeking financial help, but there is little in the way of advice regarding job-seeking opportunities.

Parents and carers speak very positively about the 'Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities' course which was run in 2010 and is scheduled to be run again in Autumn 2011. One parent said she was much better at understanding why her child behaved in certain ways as a result of attending the course and commented, 'I can deal more calmly with my child's challenging behaviour.' However, there is little information regarding the assessment of learning and development needs to ensure that users are effectively supported by the centre to improve their educational and/or personal development and raise their aspirations

Individual case studies show that the well-being of some children and parents is improved through effective, tailored and integrated care, guidance and support. For example, a parent with concerns about her child's speech and language benefited from a workshop for parents on speech and language development. In addition, centre staff have signposted parents to intervention and advice from a local charity

for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In times of crisis, families feel well supported by the centre.

Overall, however, the centre's range of services, activities and opportunities is meeting the needs of an insufficient number of users from within the centre's area. There is no clear strategy to address this or to engage priority groups, such as lone and teenage parents. The centre also recognises that it does not engage enough with fathers and male carers, or with the increasing number of Somalian families in its reach area.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	4
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	4
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	4
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

4

Leadership and management are ineffective. Lines of responsibility are not sufficiently clear and senior leaders and managers do not drive improvement effectively because evaluation lacks rigour and does not inform planning to an appropriate degree. Although users evaluate the sessions they attend, this information is not used adequately to identify priorities and set targets. Information provided by the local authority to enable the centre to target priority groups has not been used to plan accordingly for improvements in outcomes. More users from outside the centre's reach area are benefiting from centre resources than priority groups from within it. As a result, the centre cannot be sure that it is meeting the full range of users' needs in its reach area and, consequently, it does not provide adequate value for money. These weaknesses also prevent the centre from fulfilling its duties to promote equality of opportunity for all groups that it serves.

The centre has not developed a strategic, focused plan for development. Staff are not receiving the appropriate professional supervision. The local authority's strategies to evaluate the centre's effectiveness and demonstrate impact are not sufficiently developed and the centre has not been held to account for the impact it is having on outcomes for identified priority groups. The governing body, although keen to support the work of the centre, lacks parental representation and does not have a clear understanding of the qualities of the centre's services or its role in holding the centre to account. Consequently, the centre lacks effective leadership and front-line staff are not sufficiently supported and encouraged in their work.

Partnerships with other organisations, such as health, Jobcentre Plus and adult education, are not sufficiently well developed to provide a coherent approach to delivering high quality services. As a result, provision is not appropriately targeted for those groups who may benefit from the centre’s services.

Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Family support workers link appropriately with other agencies to secure children’s safety and well-being. Despite staff absences, arrangements for ensuring there is a designated person with lead responsibility for safeguarding on site are secure. Staff receive the required child protection training. Criminal record and recruitment checks are compliant and current. The project for vulnerable two-year-olds has demonstrated the centre’s commitment to the early identification of children’s needs and engagement with multi-agency support in order to improve outcomes. Case studies show that children subject to child protection arrangements are supported satisfactorily through the Common Assessment Framework. Arrangements for updating and evaluating policies and risk assessments relating to safeguarding are sound but unsystematic.

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	4
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	4
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	4
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	4
The effectiveness of the centre’s policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	4
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	4
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	4

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

The school's Early Years Foundation Stage was inspected at the same time as the children's centre and its overall provision was judged to be satisfactory. Findings from this inspection have contributed to the children's centre report.

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SUMMARY FOR CENTRE USERS

We inspected the Stroud Green Children's Centre on 13 and 14 July 2011. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

During the inspection we held meetings with the centre's staff, representatives from the local authority and from the centre's governing body, health professionals and parents. We looked at the centre's policies and information about who uses the centre. We were especially pleased to speak with some of you to find out what you think about the centre and the services it provides. Thank you for taking the time to speak to us.

You may be surprised by the outcome of this inspection because you enjoy the sessions you attend and know that centre staff work hard to provide valuable services. Despite staff absences and the lack of consistent procedures for staff supervision and professional development, staff have carried on, strengthened by their good teamwork. They have been determined to provide services and support for families who access the centre. However, the centre does not have sufficient long-term plans in place to reach out to the families that may feel reluctant or nervous about coming to the centre. The team knows, for instance, that many lone parents who live in the area need support, but without clear guidance, including support from the local authority, it has not been possible for staff to cater as effectively for them as they would have liked.

There are many good things happening at the centre, which are beneficial to the parents and users who visit it and use its services. Many of you told us how valuable you find the centre's activities and groups, and how much it supports and enhances your families' lives. We heard from parents who have gained a greater understanding of how to manage their child's behaviour and how to help them develop their child's speech and language development. Some of you have had support in seeking out training courses or volunteering in the centre and this has helped you gain qualifications leading to paid employment. Some parents feel less isolated by attending 'Stay and Play' sessions and we heard from parents who feel more confident about keeping their child safe following first-aid training. One of the things you told us you appreciated most about the centre was its convenience. You feel that

there is something for all ages, all on the same site, right from babyhood to when children leave primary school.

Despite its many positive aspects, the centre has a number of shortcomings that led to our judgement that its overall effectiveness is inadequate. These are all linked to the centre's leadership and management. As a result of these weaknesses, the centre does not have enough impact on improving the health, wellbeing and education of a wide range of families in its reach area. In order to make a bigger difference to your lives and those of your families, we have asked the local authority and the centre to set clear priorities for the future and to establish effective systems for monitoring how well the centre is achieving these. We have also recommended that the advisory board, including parent representatives, plays a stronger role in driving improvement and holding the centre to account. Another weakness is that the centre does not make enough use of the information that is available to it to check how well it is targeting and supporting the needs of all the groups in its area. We have asked leaders to remedy this, and to improve the quality of the outreach work to the local area, in order to engage more families who would benefit from what the centre has to offer.

Thank you once again for speaking to us and sharing your experiences of the centre. We wish you and your families the very best outcomes for the future.

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