

Inspection report for South Acton Children's Centre

Local authority	Ealing
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	South Acton Children's Centre
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	South Acton Children's Centre EY296597

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.

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

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

The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre, a representative of the local authority, a member of the governing body that acts as the centre's advisory board, a wide range of frontline staff including the deputy head of centre and the manager who are responsible for Early Years Foundation Stage provision and the manager of the family and community team, representatives of partner organisations including health, and families who use the centre.

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

Information about the centre

South Acton Children's Centre is a phase 1 centre and was designated in 2005. It serves a diverse catchment area that includes wards that are of the 5% most deprived in the country. Most families in the area are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds, with Somali children forming the largest individual group at just under a quarter of the primary-aged population. The proportion of families in receipt of benefits is high. Approximately 35% of children under five in the catchment area are from families who are dependent on workless benefits. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with a much narrower range of skills and abilities than those typically expected for their age.

The centre operates from 8.00am to 6.00pm, Monday to Friday, for 51 weeks per year. In addition, there are regular weekend activities. It offers a full range of services for families including health and family advice and support services;

children, adult and family learning; and Jobcentre Plus. The centre includes a maintained nursery school and registered childcare. These operate under the same name but were inspected separately, and include four specialist provisions: a special care unit for children with complex needs; a unit for children with autism; specialist provision for children with speech, language and communication difficulties; and, a nurture group.

The centre governance structure includes the local authority, the South Acton Children’s Centre governing body, which acts as the centre’s advisory board, and the ‘Parent Team’, which acts as a parents’ forum.

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 families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

South Acton Children’s Centre is good in all respects and serves its community well. Families engaging in its wide-ranging services highly value the contribution it makes to their lives. As one parent said on their evaluation, ‘Without you we would be lost.’ Staff at different levels work effectively to personalise the support they offer families, particularly for those identified as most in need. This often includes individualised interventions and support in families’ homes. The annual weekend holiday for targeted families, organised and run by centre staff, typifies not only the high aspirations staff have for families, but also the willingness of staff to ‘go that extra mile’ to achieve it, as the head of centre put it. Staff design and adapt centre sessions, and those they provide in the community, well to the meet the needs of families who use them.

The effective work of South Acton is improving outcomes for the large majority of families well. Following all live births, home visits by the centre ensures it reaches almost all new parents in the catchment area. Families using the centre are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy. Parents and children demonstrate they feel safe and very confident to come into the welcoming, vibrant and attractive environment created by the committed team of staff. Effective systems underpin this to ensure the safety of those who use the centre’s facilities.

Careful decisions and insightful forward planning by centre leaders have helped the centre to sustain a good-quality provision in a time of significant changes in funding. Prudent investment in training centre staff has helped maintain the capacity to offer advice and guidance to families where specific 'expert' input was no longer possible, for example by the dietician. The centre's proactive stance in nurturing and promoting effective partnership working not only enhances outcomes for families, but also supports its drive to develop sustainable services.

The centre has a good range of data to evidence its impact. Leaders continue to develop and improve systems to ensure they have the information necessary to drive improvements. For example, although the centre effectively tracks how successfully it reaches target groups, leaders recognise the need to be able to break data down more readily by different outcomes for individual groups. Leaders have correctly identified that without this sort of analysis the centre's self-evaluation, although accurate and supported by evidence of impact, is not as rigorous and precise as it could be to drive even more rapid improvement. That said, the centre knows itself and the community it serves well and is successfully securing improvements in outcomes for families. Strong links with families who use the centre, parent representatives on the governing body, and the active 'Parent Team' that acts as the centre's forum, ensure they are involved in the governance of the centre. At all levels, leaders have secured a strong sense of desire and determination to succeed in making the centre increasingly effective. Consequently, it has a good capacity to sustain further improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Refine the use of data to provide sharper evidence of the impact the centre has on improving individual outcomes for its different target groups.
- Analyse and use this evidence, together with the centre's other monitoring information, to secure a more rigorous and searching level of analysis and self-evaluation, and to achieve greater precision in future planning.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Families that use the centre treat each other with respect and contribute well to the positive atmosphere. The centre has a productive partnership with the charity Coram to coordinate and lead on most volunteering opportunities for parents. Progression rates for adults are good and approximately one in five centre staff is a former parent of the centre. The creation of local women-only gym sessions, that originated from a group of parents engaged in health promotion activities at the centre, exemplifies how some are developing enterprising behaviour. The 'Parent Team' is proactive and confident to express views about the centre's services which leads to changes and developments in the centre's offer. The head of centre recognises the potential of this group as a way to involve families even more in the 'bigger picture'

and strategic leadership of the centre.

Health-related activities reach a very large majority of the centre's target groups well. For example, in the centre's popular 'Let's Get Cooking' group, focused on healthy eating, parents were developing their cooking skills, while their children enjoyed helping and exploring new foods. The retention of a midwife by the centre significantly enhances the antenatal and postnatal support it offers, including for teenage mothers. The percentage of babies in the area totally breastfed at six to eight weeks is broadly in line with the national average. The centre has plans to tighten its tracking of how many families access further services and sustain engagement following the initial home visit. Most children attend health practices for immunisations. However, leaders have identified a potential dip in its reach to children between eighteen months and two-years-old. The gap between obesity rates in the Reception Year in the local area and nationally is narrowing.

The proportions locally reaching the expected level at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage are broadly in line with national averages. The percentage gap between the lowest attaining 20% and the median has reduced well in recent years and is now broadly in line with the national average. There is convincing evidence that matches the achievements of children who have accessed centre services to demonstrate the good impact it has for most. From the earliest stages, the centre's 'Baby Book Group' at the local library encourages parents to learn and use Makaton sign language to aid communication. The centre also tracks and accredits adults' achievements through specific courses. Flexible scheduling of sessions to promote the learning of both parents and children together ensures these successfully reach a good number of fathers too.

Having participated in a work-focused pilot, the centre identified the positive impact it had moving parents of children in poverty towards the job market. Services of a part-time Jobcentre Plus adviser have helped secure good engagement from the families that use the centre in activities relevant to developing economic stability and independence, just over a third of the total number. The centre is responsive to the need to help some parents secure the foundations and take the earliest small steps towards future potential employment, for example through the introduction self-esteem sessions. The proportion of under fives living in households dependent on workless benefits in the locality has shown a good reduction in recent years.

Safety is a key focus for centre staff on all home visits. Outreach workers give parents bespoke individual advice on keeping their children safe, based on potential hazards they identify, with safety equipment provided as necessary. Detailed and thorough record keeping and the centre's 'story catching' provide case-study evidence of clearly improved outcomes for those identified as most in need of support, including those subject to child protection, child in need or Common Assessment Framework procedures. These also illustrate the effectiveness of early intervention in reducing the need for subsequent higher levels of support. The number of children subject to a child protection plan has reduced. Where the level of intervention reduces, the centre continues to monitor cases closely, to ensure

improved outcomes are sustained. Disabled children and their families, or those with additional and sometimes complex needs that attend one of the specialist provisions at the centre, are fully included in other activities as appropriate.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre understands the needs of the community it serves well, informed by both its own knowledge and effective partnership working. Staff use this information thoughtfully to provide courses and sessions to meet particular needs, for example English for speakers of other languages specifically for catering. Provision to help children, parents and families together to learn and develop is consistently effective. In the 'Messy Fingers Group', one parent commented how she previously did not know how to make dough, whilst another said, 'It's great – I don't mind how messy he gets!' Achievements are highly valued and celebrated through the presentation of certificates and the prestigious 'Oscars' ceremony, hosted by the centre, with awards presented by the mayor.

Enhanced by activities located across the community, participation rates by the target groups of families are good and improving. Typical of the centre's reflective approach, although it has had success engaging Somali fathers in the Saturday workshops, it is seeking ways to develop its reach to this particular group still further. Staff that run sessions are responsive to the needs of those that attend, and confident to adapt and adjust them to meet the needs of families as appropriate, leading to good impact across the outcome areas. The centre has recently begun to extend its use of entry and exit self-evaluation questionnaires, completed by parents, to evaluate individual services, although it is too soon for leaders to have analysed this fully. At present, there is no formalised system for group facilitators to evaluate improving outcomes for families based on their own assessments, for example their evidence-based view of how parents' understanding of healthy eating is developing.

Significant levels of individual guidance offered in family homes ensure that those identified as most in need, including families suffering the effects of domestic violence, are well supported. Knowledgeable staff are readily available to provide advice for parents regarding benefits, help them complete paperwork or use the information technology point to print necessary information. As well as clear signposting, staff accompany families to access services not provided directly by the centre, if appropriate. Parents feel confident to turn to the centre in times of crisis and feel well supported when they do. In periods of greatest need, centre staff make regular and sustained contact checks with families, sometimes more than once per day.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

A strong sense of aspiration for the centre and families that use it permeates from senior leaders throughout staff at all levels. Plans for improvement prioritise actions effectively, although sometimes targets are not measurable or precise enough. Inclusive practice is central to the centre's vision. The fully integrated specialist provisions are part of the centre's core life and values. Through these, the centre successfully reaches high numbers of children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, one way it successfully removes barriers to learning and well-being and gathers the views of those who might not otherwise share them. This effectively combines with the centre's routine collection and use of the views of others accessing services.

Centre staff and leaders at all levels are extremely proactive in developing partnerships to extend and integrate services and secure sustainability. Relationships between key partners are positive and clearly understood. Leaders are using these links well to extend the range of data available to it to evaluate trends, for example working with the midwife to refine data collection around breastfeeding. Frontline staff understand the centre's priorities and systems relating to centre management and professional supervision well. Information sharing protocols are well established.

The centre demonstrates good practice in its policies and procedures for safeguarding. All staff receive training relevant to their role and clear records of this are maintained. Consequently, staff know and follow procedures well. The centre is

very proactive in its links with other professionals to protect children, including regular attendance at weekly multi-agency meetings and transition discussions with social workers. Record keeping is detailed and thorough. Senior leaders are trained in safer recruitment procedures and the centre has established and maintains a single central register.

Effective governance arrangements support centre leaders well, challenge them to improve provision and outcomes, and effectively hold them to account. Parent representatives on the governing body and the 'Parent Team' are important parts of the governance structure that ensure leaders consider family views well. The centre is currently extending its existing good resource management by deepening analysis of detailed costing of individual services and reach. Leaders recognise the importance that the extra dimension of refined data about service impact on outcomes for different groups will bring to this. Considering the improvements in outcomes, the centre provides good 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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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 of Early Years Foundation Stage provision at the centre, 4 and 5 October 2011.

The inspection of childcare on non-domestic premises provided by the centre, 25

May 2011.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the South Acton Children's Centre on 5 and 6 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked with staff, the local authority, a member of the governing body and some of you.

The centre serves you and your community well. You told us that you highly value the contribution it makes to your lives. Staff at the centre work very hard to make the service, guidance and support they give you personal to your particular needs. For some of you, this includes support in your own homes. We know that others of you are particularly grateful for the opportunity of the annual weekend away to Romney Sands. We were impressed by the centre's commitment to this and pleased to learn about the benefits it brings you.

Various activities at the centre are helping you to develop healthier lifestyles for you and your families. We enjoyed visiting the 'Let's Get Cooking' group and know that some of you were involved in coming up with the idea for this. We were delighted to learn that most of you are ensuring your children have the correct immunisations. For all expectant or new mothers, it is reassuring to know that the centre is able to make contact with almost all of you in your homes, and hope you will help the centre to keep in contact with you as your babies begin to grow. The centre is also helping you to keep your children safe and providing safety equipment if necessary to protect them.

You and your children achieve well in sessions at the centre, and those in the community centre or library. There is a good range of activities for you to learn, either together with your children, or at your own level. Many of you have done very well and been awarded with certificates and/or completed accredited courses. The centre's 'Oscars' ceremony sounds great, and many congratulations to all of you who have been presented with a certificate or won an award.

We found out that the centre regularly asks you for your views on the services it provides. Some of you play an important role in representing the views of families as part of the 'Parent Team' or as parent representatives on the governing body. The centre's leaders are very careful in their planning to try to keep your services going

as funding changes. They are working very well with other agencies and professionals, as well as training their own staff in different things to do this.

We found staff at all levels to have high aspirations for you and your centre. To help them make things even better, we have asked those responsible for running the centre to do a couple of important things. Firstly, we would like them to put in place plans they are developing to make even better use of data to see where they are having the most and least success in making a difference for you. Then, we have asked them to use this to get an even more detailed picture of how effective the centre is, and to make the plans they have to improve it as precise as they can be.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak to us and share your thoughts with us. We valued your contributions and they were an important part of our inspection. We hope you will continue to support the centre.

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