

Inspection report for Alderwood Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Greenwich
Inspection number	383476
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Kath Beck

Centre leader	Barbara Warren
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	Rainham Close Eltham London SE9 2JH
Telephone number	020 8850 6841
Fax number	020 8859 8905
Email address	Headteacher@alderwood.greenwich.sch.uk

Linked school if applicable	Alderwood Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Alderwood Children's Centre Nursery

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

Report published: October 2011



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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@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 partner primary school that also included the registered provision for under threes was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of that inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

Inspectors held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, executive headteacher, the senior management team and representatives from the local authority and services offered by the centre. They met with outreach workers, families using the services, members of the advisory board, and Parents' Forum. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Alderwood Children's Centre is a phase two children's centre that shares its accommodation with Alderwood Primary School in Eltham, London. It covers Eltham South ward. Levels of deprivation vary across the reach, but overall this is one of the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The local authority has delegated responsibility for the leadership and management of the centre to the governing body of the primary school. The advisory board is a subcommittee of the governing body. The Chair of the Governing Body, chair of the advisory board and the executive headteacher are new to their roles. The executive headteacher has overall responsibility for the centre, school and registered provision for 21 children under three. The centre was designated with the full core offer in 2007. It provides childcare, family support, child and family health, and job and benefits advice. Midwifery and health visitor services are provided on site. The area includes private developments, social housing and flats. The number of lone and workless families on benefits is higher than the national average. Families come from diverse cultures with the largest groups coming from White British, East European and Black African

backgrounds. Children's development when they first start in the Early Years Foundation Stage is well below the expected levels.

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

Alderwood is a good centre. Its warm, welcoming and friendly atmosphere attracts a very large majority to attend the well-targeted and universal programmes. These play an important role in changing the lives of young children, their parents and their carers. Equality of opportunity, early intervention, safeguarding and reducing the risk of harm to children are central to its work. One parent said, 'We all love coming here, no-one is ever turned away.' Outcomes for families are good, especially in improving their parenting skills and managing their children's behaviour.

Those with responsibility for the centre's day-to-day management work closely as a senior team using their specific skills to best advantage. Throughout a period of instability in the overall leadership, they have been highly effective in meeting the demands of the rapidly increasing number of families attending the centre. Results of surveys clearly show high levels of satisfaction. Attendance this year is almost double that of last year. The centre engages successfully with 67% of the families living in the most deprived area of the reach and 24% from outside the reach area. Good quality partnerships with a range of professionals, including health, are providing a more coherent approach to resolving challenges families face. A high number of providers from the private, voluntary and independent sectors are involved in delivering courses and assistance to families through the centre. However, links with local community organisations are not yet fully developed. This does not always make it easy for staff to engage with those who are particularly hard to reach across all the target groups. Individual and personal needs are identified effectively and support tailored well to meet them. Consequently, some lone parents and carers have made marked progress in overcoming their difficulties. One parent said, 'I do not know what I would have done without staff at this centre. My life is still difficult, but now I know I can face the future.'

The local authority took determined action to resolve strategic leadership difficulties in the school and centre. It remained confident in the centre's success, continuing to offer appropriate challenge and effective support. Since their appointment the executive headteacher and Chair of the Governing Body have worked with the management team in robustly evaluating each aspect of the centre's provision. This has provided a very clear view of its strengths and areas for development. The development plan has been revised using recent data provided by the local authority. Sharply focused aims for development have been set. These include engaging more target groups, such as fathers and teenage parents. Evidence already shows success in attracting these groups. Volunteers make an important contribution to 'Stay and Play' and crèche provision. The newly established Parents' Forum provides an important voice for parents and carers, but is not yet contributing fully to the decision-making process. Very recent changes to advisory board personnel have resulted in fewer representatives from groups attending the centre. There has not been time to reconstitute it fully or to develop skills in the analysis of data to contribute to the centre development plan or monitor its effectiveness.

On the basis of what it has accomplished so far, together with clear, well-targeted plans to bring about even better outcomes and provision for families, the centre has a good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- In conjunction with the local authority, strengthen the governance of the centre by:
 - ensuring there is sufficiently broad representation from services, parents and carers on the advisory board so that they are involved fully in the decision-making process
 - enhancing the skills of those on the advisory board so that they use data more effectively to set and monitor the priorities in the centre's development plan.
- In the centre, build on existing good relationships with key partners and groups in the locality, to identify those who are the hardest to reach and enable them to access its universal and targeted services.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Early intervention is a priority in keeping children safe. A high number of families attend the ante- and post-natal clinics. Health visitors and midwives alert the centre to individuals who need intensive assistance. Families subject to the Common Assessment Framework or on a child protection plan are well supported. Documents show there is clear improvement in the way children are cared for and in their health and well-being. Home visits, one-to-one advice, programmes in the centre and clear

introductions to other professionals assist families, especially those subject to domestic violence, in reducing the risk of harm to their children. Structured parenting programmes help parents and carers to understand their child's development and to manage behavioural challenges successfully.

Following information from the midwifery service about the increasing numbers of pregnant mothers who are obese, the centre provided special cookery courses. These raised the awareness of these families about the importance of eating healthily from an early age. The centre is very successful in enabling the majority of mothers who commence breastfeeding to sustain it over six months. Good advice about weaning and the amount of sugar and salt in everyday foods assists families in making healthy choices in their child's diet. Guidance from a speech therapist means families learn successfully to engage in early communications with their children. 'Every Child a Talker,' a national project to develop children's communication skills, builds successfully on this work. Attendance at 'Stay and Play', 'arts and crafts', 'drop-in' sessions, music therapy, and yoga reduces the sense of isolation. Families make new friends from all backgrounds and young children learn to play happily with others. One parent said, 'I had post-natal depression. Coming here has helped me to understand that I am not the only one to have it and that I will get better.'

Families make good progress educationally and in their personal and social development. Children in the 'Upto3s' and the crèche benefit from well-planned sessions that promote their personal, social and emotional development as well as their early literacy and numeracy skills in fun ways. Data used to track the progress of the children show that 63% of children who had previously accessed the 'UpTo3s' provision exceeded national expectations at the age of five. They obtained a score of seven or more across these areas of learning, with the exception of writing. A majority of adults take courses to learn to speak English fluently and improve their skills in numeracy and literacy. All taking the courses pass and gain qualifications. The centre is successfully engaging with a number of families, including teenage parents, to help them acquire qualifications and obtain work. Effective guidance in gaining access to benefits to which families, who are in most need of support, are entitled is improving their economic stability.

The Parents' Forum is looking at innovative ways in which it can raise money to sustain successful courses that no longer run because of lack of funding. It is awaiting permission from the governing body before it can go ahead. Some parents and carers contribute to the centre's programme by volunteering because they want 'to give something back'.

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 quality of childcare in the centre is good. Parents and carers leave their children in the crèche confident they will be happy while they are away. Planning for activities in the crèche, 'Stay and Play' and the nursery is based on the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework. They promote children's personal, social and emotional development and language skills strongly. Staff and providers are experienced and knowledgeable, showing parents and carers sensitively how they too can help their children to learn through play. Support for families, in all the target groups, through the wide range of services is well coordinated. Outreach workers and family support staff empower parents and carers in most need, such as lone parents or those subject to domestic abuse, to make the decisions that change their lives. Personalised support helps families to improve their well-being across all the outcomes. Programmes that enable parents and carers to foresee risks before problems arise are prioritised. For example, speech therapy reminds parents and carers of potential difficulties if children are allowed to keep their dummies too long. Provision to help in giving up smoking has been suspended until new staff have completed their training. The centre has secured the services of experienced providers who, in the absence of Jobcentre Plus, provide advice about jobs, housing and benefits.

The centre uses data, local knowledge, views of providers and feedback from families to provide a wide ranging programme to identify, assess and meet needs. Regular service provider and staff meetings keep the outcomes for adults and children, and the effectiveness of programmes, under review. Staff exploit texting and telephone calls to remind families, especially teenage families, to attend. Participation rates are high as sessions are of good quality. As a result the centre has introduced more sessions of popular courses and a booking system to ensure that those most in need of support can attend. Some sessions, such as music therapy, are run to meet the needs of families with children with serious behavioural or emotional needs. A programme to encourage more fathers to attend the centre is being developed. However, the centre is not open at weekends and this limits the access of some families. Case studies indicate that when commencing parenting classes, parents and carers, particularly those who are lone parents, set goals to achieve, such as enabling their child to become independent, and are successful in reaching them.

Provision in the centre offers a good balance of opportunities for children and adults, across all the target groups, to learn and develop educationally and personally. Accommodation is good so that several activities can be offered at any one time. One parent said, 'I enjoy coming here. It is one stop I don't have to travel far.' Another said, 'I walk a long distance to get here as there is so much to do and I get a lot from it.' Achievements are recognised through the award of certificates and personal praise. Staff know their families well. They direct and support them in accessing further training or educational courses in local colleges as appropriate. Aspirations are raised when providers run leadership or management courses in the centre.

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

Senior leaders ensure that all staff, volunteers and service providers working in the centre are suitable to work with children and young adults. All have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau. Multi-agency cooperation is effective in identifying early those who are most in need of intervention and support. Links with local community organisations, which also do much to support families, are less well developed. Staff in the centre are well trained in safeguarding. They know how to recognise new families in distress when they 'drop in' and help them access the support they need. Case studies reflect the significant success of support programmes. These are devised to promote emotional health and well-being and raise the confidence and self-esteem of lone parents, those with mental health difficulties and those subjected to domestic violence.

The system for decision-making through the local authority, senior leaders and the senior management is good, although the contribution from the advisory board is less than it should be. Clear roles and responsibilities and good integrated provision have resulted in the centre engaging with a large majority of families in the area. Regular meetings between managers and service providers link to future planning well. Accurate and robust evaluation, including the views of families and the local authority, is used to set ambitious targets for improvement. The inclusion of data to monitor outcomes and set future targets is at an early stage of development.

The centre is ambitious in its desire to make a difference for all families, regardless of their diverse backgrounds. Interpreting services are available for those who do not speak English. All programmes, and specialist support, are available to those with

learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The centre offers good value for money. Resources are good quality. Accommodation is in full use every week day and is open for all but four weeks of the year. Staff and provider skills are deployed efficiently to improve outcomes for all.

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

Information from the inspection of Alderwood Primary School that was inspected at the same time as the centre. The school inspection included the inspection of Alderwood Children's Centre 'Upto3s'.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Alderwood Children's Centre on 6 – 7 October 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

I am sure you will remember that I visited the centre with a colleague recently. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us about the help you have been given by the centre. You told us that you really enjoy coming to the centre. It has helped you a lot in giving you the confidence to deal with very difficult situations in your lives and to become better parents to your children, keeping them safe. You mentioned that you always receive a warm, friendly welcome and can ask for help at any time. Some of you said that you did not know what you would have done without the centre, as you did not know which way to turn for help. Once in the centre you are put in touch with the right people to help you. Staff support you really well, and help you to believe that you can make your own decisions.

In our discussions you mentioned that you enjoy all the activities, especially 'Stay and Play', and that the crèche has been invaluable in allowing you to attend many of the courses. You really appreciate the support you have been given to persevere with breastfeeding and weaning your babies. You say the advice from the oral health specialist helped you to understand more about the amount of sugar in every day food. You avoid these foods and sweets and keep your children's teeth healthy. You also say that the speech therapist has helped you to communicate effectively with your children from an early age. You are clear that the centre listens to you and there are now separate sessions for 'Stay and Play' for babies and toddlers as a result of your suggestions. Some of you are proud to act as volunteers running your own sessions. The Parents' Forum is relatively new, but its members have many good ideas to help the centre to improve. It is not yet helping those responsible for the overall management of the centre to make decisions about its development.

You told us that the number of people using the centre has grown a lot, in the past couple of years particularly. You are pleased with its success and feel that you have been part of its growth, as you have told all your friends to come along as it has so much to offer. Many of you first came to the centre to visit the midwife or health visitor. It was then that you realised there were all kinds of interesting and fun activities you could attend. Several of you said that as a result you have made new friends and overcome depression because you realised others were experiencing similar difficulties in bringing up their children.

The managers responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre have been highly effective in keeping up with the increasing number of families. They have brought in all kinds of services and providers so that you can get the guidance you need. You are probably aware that the executive headteacher and the Chair of the Governing Body of the school are new to their roles in the school and centre. They have made a lot of changes for the better. The make-up of the advisory board which makes sure that the centre is meeting your needs has also changed a lot recently. Those who are new to the board are not sufficiently aware of the numerical data that is available to help them to plan to improve the centre and check how well it is doing. Also the board does not have enough representatives from you or professionals at the moment. That said, staff at the centre, the advisory board, and the executive headteacher know the local area in detail. They recognise that it is important to work

with groups out in the local community, to find out if there are other people who would benefit from visiting the centre to change their lives too.

We have asked the leaders and managers to work with the local authority to make the following changes. In order to strengthen the leadership and management of the centre:

- make sure that the advisory board includes sufficient representatives from parents, carers and services so they can contribute fully to decisions made about the centre
- help those on the advisory board to undergo training so that they use numerical information more effectively to set priorities in the centre's development plan and check that they are proving successful.

In addition, we have asked leaders and managers to make sure that within the centre they:

- enable staff to build on good relationships with professionals and groups in the locality to identify those who are the hardest to reach so they too access the services.

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