

Inspection report for Limetrees Park Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Ealing
Inspection number	383693
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Reporting inspector	Christine Davies HMI

Centre leaders	Operational lead – Margie Hunt Strategic lead – Sue Benson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY331951 Cybertots EY331339 Limetrees After School Club
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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 registered early years/childcare provision of Limetrees After School Club was carried out during the same week as the inspection of the centre under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with leaders, managers and staff of the centre and representatives of partner organisations. They met parents and observed the centre's work. Inspectors looked at a range of relevant documentation, including case studies and parents' evaluations of activities.

Information about the centre

The centre is located in a residential area of Northolt. The site developed from an existing play centre and was designated as a phase one children's centre in 2006. It offers the full range of services in collaboration with two linked children's centres that are located nearby. It is managed directly by Ealing Council. Its work is guided by an independent advisory board. The centre is open seven days a week. Managers are supported by nine full- and part-time playworkers and an administrator. The centre has its own outdoor play areas with direct access to open parkland. An after-school club for 24 children and a 20 place childcare nursery run on the site.

Parts of the area served are among the 20% most deprived in the country. Unemployment rates and the number of families in receipt of workless benefits at 41% are higher than the national average. Obesity rates for children and adults are much higher than the national and local averages. There are high numbers of teenage parents and crime rates are among the worst 5% in the country. The ethnicity of the population has changed in the last 10 years from 60% White British to more than 60% minority ethnic groups and individuals. The largest minority, at around 10%, is people of Somali heritage. A sizeable minority of children and their parents are at an early stage of speaking English. Most children's skills and understanding are low on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

Limetrees Park Children's Centre gives good support to children and their families. It has built a reputation as an essential part of children's lives in the community. The centre's emphasis on inclusion is good. The great majority of regular users are among the groups and individuals most in need of support, such as those with English as an additional language. Families use the centre regularly and their lives are improving. The centre's programme of informal group activities, structured courses, its open door for advice and extensive links to other services are well matched to local needs. Staff give a warm individual welcome that encourages a sense of belonging in regular and new users alike. Parents say that the centre is a 'home from home'. The centre is well used at weekends. Families say it is a 'lifeline', especially when they are on a restricted income and find it difficult to travel further afield.

The wellbeing and development of families using the centre improves as they become less isolated and thoroughly enjoy taking part in the wide range of activities on offer. The outcomes for families attending are mostly at a good level and improving, particularly in communication skills. Children attending the centre rapidly develop the social skills that help them when they go on to school. Parents feel safe and families are safeguarded. Staff are vigilant and act promptly to secure family support or refer children and vulnerable adults on to specialist health or child protection services in times of family crisis. Adults build on their learning and involvement at the centre as a starting point for a route to employment, which has a good impact on economic stability for families in the area. Despite many users making discernible changes, for example taking up exercise classes, outcomes for health are not improving as well as other aspects of users' lives, obesity levels in the area are high.

The work of the centre is underpinned by close partnerships with an extensive range of agencies. The local authority gives a strong strategic steer. Regular monitoring and evaluation at different levels of the centre's work, involving partners and parents, give the centre a broad overview of what is working well. Leaders and managers take steps to improve by learning from partner organisations, for example by tracking children's Early Years Foundation Stage profiles when they move from

the childcare on site to local schools. The rigour of evaluation is exemplary in some respects with good impact on focussing resources to improve outcomes, for example to promote children's communication skills. However, not all plans and evaluations have the same level of detail or reach this searching level of analysis so that improvement is variable.

The centre uses resources intensively and effectively. Efforts focus strongly on tackling the priority needs, which is improving the outcomes for families well and the work represents good value for money. With continued positive participation of users and the committed support of partners, the centre's capacity to improve even further is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the precision of self-evaluation and rigour of analysis to secure consistent improvement in all outcomes, including being healthy, by:
 - setting precise targets and using quantifiable measures of success in all plans and using these in evaluation

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Whole families, including fathers and grandparents, use the extensive outdoor play facilities and keep fit at dance, football and Pilates classes. Families, representing all areas of the community, who attend the popular 'I want carrots' cook and eat classes adopt and sustain healthier eating. The impact of healthy lifestyle messages is slow to reach the wider community. Breastfeeding rates in the area are low and few parents are joining smoking cessation programmes. Outreach work from a linked children's centre ensures that the great majority of families, know about and take up maternity services and attend baby clinics regularly. Specialist services are readily available in the area to support teenage parents and parents or children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Staff show parents how to manage their children's behaviour consistently so that children share, take turns and use equipment safely. Parents feel safe to come to the centre and ask for help in times of family crisis or to help stop domestic violence. One parent said, 'This is our safe family – no matter what problems we have in the outside world.' With the involvement of Supportive Action for Ealing (SAFE) and the Coram voluntary family support organisation, good work is done to prevent family breakdown. The Common Assessment Framework is used effectively to engage parents in work with the centre that improves their confidence and skill in caring for their children safely.

The achievements of children in the childcare provision on site, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are tracked closely and they make good progress, often from very low starting points. Children in all provision

choose their own activities and equipment, behave well and develop positive attitudes to learning that help them to settle in easily to childcare and school nursery classes. Parents and carers, including those with English as a second language, are enthusiastic learners alongside their children during singing and rhyme times in play sessions. Through the ever-changing activities, parents increase their confidence in understanding their child's development and improve their practical skills, such as cookery.

Many families in the community have a strong bond with the centre. This includes individuals from families with more than one generation out of work, which is a particular concern in the area. Users treat each other with respect and friendship in the centre's welcoming atmosphere. Long-established users and families new to the area represent their views which influence the centre's plans.

Adults achieve well in first aid, cookery and parenting classes. Their learning is demonstrated well on courses that are formally assessed by their tutors, such as 'Happy parent, happy child'. Parents volunteer to help in the centre and community. Learning informally and helping out give many parents a new positive view of what they can achieve. The close links between Limetrees Park and West London Academy Children's Centre provide ready support for parents who want to progress in basic education skills and childcare qualifications up to Level 3 NVQ. Most of the parents taking this route find local employment. Parents following-up other courses appreciate the up-to-date advice and guidance from a Jobcentre Plus advisor at the centre.

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	3
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 range of classes, groups and one-to-one advice sessions is highly appropriate to the current priorities identified with partners in the area. Good information sharing among health, social care and early years professionals ensures that the programme

is coherent and that the centre keeps track of needs. The location of high-quality formal learning and informal development groups in three centres makes effective use of local, accessible, facilities for users. Services are adapted and tailored well to match families' interests, for example by putting on more free dance and exercise classes. The centre adds significantly to the protection of families by providing an attractive programme of activities, seven days a week.

The resources at stay and play groups are good. Sessions are well planned so that adults and children learn alongside each other. Staff are well skilled and qualified for their roles. Childcare, nursery and centre staff work closely together to help improve outcomes in speaking and listening for all children and parents as they move from community provision, to daycare and on to school with good planning and tracking of children's achievements. A well-organised crèche supports children purposefully while parents attend courses in basic education and childcare. Partners, such as the Coram organisation play their part in ensuring that learning and enjoyment comes into everyone's lives, through story time sessions in the local library.

Families in the community value the centre as a place to go for advice on all routine matters to do with family life and in times of crisis. The situation for many vulnerable families, for example those looking to return to work, is improving because of the information and guidance given locally. A specialist service, the family nurse partnership, is thoughtfully designed to support the high numbers of teenage parents living locally. Work with partners ensures that the childcare provided at the centre and in the area is good quality so that take up is high.

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

The governance and accountability arrangements are set out effectively in the local authority's strategic plans. Staffing structures are clearly defined to make the best of complex arrangements between three children's centres and their partners. Day-to-day management ensures that the premises are used intensively and that all potential users know about and can access the activities they need to provide good value for money. The blend of universal and specialised activities offered locally by the centre means that families do not feel singled out for support. Outcomes for users are good as aspects of individuals' lives improve rapidly through regular attendance, although health outcomes are improving more slowly than others.

Partnerships with voluntary sector organisations play a significant part in helping the centre to provide well for families in need of safeguarding. Protocols for joint work

are effective. Robust arrangements exist to ensure the safety and health of children and other users. The centre ensures that good safe-recruitment, vetting and visitor procedures are in place. Parents play their part by supervising their children well when playing in the outdoor areas.

The drive to provide services that are attractive to all children, parents and carers in the area, particularly the most vulnerable, shapes the centre's provision. Good data management with partners contributes effectively to the centre's accurate understanding of the challenges facing families in the area. Users give their views regularly and potential users' views have influenced the centre's programme greatly. Notable examples are the integration of seven-day-a-week play services with the centres family support and information, advice and guidance activities. The community's preferences have influenced the choice of venues. Users' and partners' views are integral to the centre's self-evaluation. Day-to-day management by the centre and partners secures good quality in provision. The centre has set precise targets and quantifiable measures by which to assess the success of many, but not all, of its activities and some measurements are in development.

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 findings of the After School Club from the inspection that took place in the same week.

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from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Limetrees Park Children's Centre on 23 and 24 November 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We were very pleased to talk to some of you about the centre's work. I would particularly like to thank the people who came in to meet us at times when they would not normally come to the centre. Here is a short report of what we found.

The centre is truly at the heart of the community. Many parents and grandparents have continued coming to Limetrees since it started as a play centre in the 1970s. Some of you told us that the centre is like a 'home from home' for you and your children. Families new to the area find a warm welcome. You told us you enjoy meeting new people and friendships carry on as your children move on to school.

Several of you say that you 'practically live at the centre'. We agree that the managers and everyone working at the centre get to know you well. They do the best they can to make sure the activities that they put on are helpful and are enjoyable. As a result, most families in the area use the centre at some time while their children are young and the centre's groups are usually very full.

Parents told us that the opening hours and locations are very convenient for them. One of the centre's great strengths is that that managers and staff have listened to your views and they keep the centre open seven days a week.

The centre works very closely with other centres, health and other agencies to ensure that if they cannot provide an activity, like a training course at the Limetrees, the activity is set up in West London Academy or Academy Gardens children's centres.

Many of you gave us good examples of times when the centre has helped you to cope with the routines of family life and in times of crisis. The centre works well to help keep families safe in the area and get help when you need it.

We see from parent's feedback that you are very pleased with the services and the guidance that the centre gives you. You say you are confident that the staff can answer your questions on 'on any subject to do with children and families'. We agree that knowledgeable staff and the specialists that come to the centre give good information and advice about caring for your children, health problems, moving your child on to school, training and employment.

Your relationships with staff are very positive. Everyone is treated with respect. We found that no matter what your age, needs or background, all adults and children enjoy the stay and play sessions. Children and parents are keen to learn and many improve their English rapidly.

The support from skilled play workers means that your children are happy, confident and enthusiastic about coming to the centre. Children learn to get on in groups and develop positive attitudes that help them to settle in well when they move on to school.

We found that those of you attending regularly become healthier because of the support and advice given by the centre. We were particularly pleased to see you and your children enjoying the centre's outdoor spaces. We loved hearing that having the extra space encourages you to take up healthy, active lifestyles. Although the centre concentrates on helping to improve health, still too few people in the area overall are making changes to healthy lifestyles that will help tackle problems like being overweight.

Volunteering is strongly encouraged by the staff at the centre. This helps many of you gain confidence in the skills you need for working now or in the future. From these first steps, many of you take up further training and may go on to work. The centre effectively puts effort into helping parents find courses and childcare when parents are ready to get back to work. This is successful for good numbers of you.

The centre listens to your views and takes other organisations' views of its work into account when it is planning its programme of activities. The managers make sure that the programme is thoughtful and that the activities are well run and are good quality. Some plans and parts of evaluations are very detailed. We have asked the centre to make some of their plans, and their evaluations, even more precise so that the work of the centre will help to improve lives of young families consistently, including being healthy

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