

Inspection report for Willow Children's Centre

Local authority	Islington
Inspection number	384220
Inspection dates	19–20 September 2012
Reporting inspector	Alan Comerford-Dunbar

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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Willow Children's Centre: EY131749

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

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Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

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

The inspectors held meetings with staff and senior leaders, parents and members of the advisory board. They met with a range of partners, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Willow Children's Centre is a phase one centre which opened in 2006. The centre is located on a site in the Holloway area of the London Borough of Islington. The centre operates from a purpose-built single-storey building. There are three nursery rooms that are primarily used for activities with babies, toddlers, and nursery-aged children. There is also a large enclosed outside play area which can be divided into sections for delivering activities.

The centre meets its core purpose core offer and offers a range of services including health support, adult courses and workshops. A range of services are delivered directly from the main building; however, some services are delivered off site and in association with other providers.

Families living in the reach area come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Fifty one per cent of families are of White British heritage with the rest from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, including Bangladeshi, Somali, Turkish, Kurdish, Black Caribbean, Black African and Chinese. Almost 42% of children speak English as an additional language. The centre serves one of the most deprived areas nationally. The proportion of workless families is 19% and currently 27% of families benefit from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. The area has a mixture of housing with some privately owned, a significant proportion privately rented and a high number of families living in social housing.

Currently, 755 children under the age of five years live in the centre's reach area, of these 75% are registered with the centre. Many children enter early years provision with a range of skills and knowledge below those typically expected for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy. The proportion of children attending school in the area who are known to be eligible for free school meals is above the national average. There are 117 lone parents registered at the centre in receipt of benefits.

The local authority is responsible for the governance of the centre. The centre has an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community, professional agencies and parents. The advisory board has oversight of three children's centres in the Islington area cluster.

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

Willow Children's Centre is a good centre with some outstanding features. The care, guidance and support available for families, especially when they most need it, are excellent. The ready availability of inter-agency working ensures all family needs are met well. The centre epitomises a multicultural centre at the heart of its community. A walk through the centre is a delight to the senses as celebrations of a multitude of cultures are openly displayed on walls and this promotes community cohesion exceptionally well.

Outcomes for families are good overall and outstanding in respect of health-related matters. A wide range of strategies ensures that the health and well-being of all families improve. Healthy eating is actively encouraged by centre staff at every opportunity. Obesity rates have dropped significantly and are below the national average. The support for the emotional health of parents is exceptionally well managed. As one parent said, 'Now I've sorted myself out I can support my kids.'

Good provision meets the needs of most families well. Centre staff constantly strive to improve the education of children and parents through a variety of activities. The Early Years Foundation Stage profiles are encouraging with an improving trend in the

proportion of children reaching a good level of development. Parents are encouraged to be 'the first educators' for their children. Advice and guidance to parents in order to improve their economic and social well-being are good. Although parents express their needs to staff within the centre well, the absence of more structured arrangements restricts parents' full involvement in centre decision-making. The centre's self-evaluation report accurately identifies the need to formalise the use of parents as volunteers, also to prioritise the establishment of the parents' forum and their involvement in the advisory board.

The acting centre manager, senior leaders and staff are passionate about improving life chances for families within the reach area. There is a clear vision, accurate self-evaluation and effective accountability and governance arrangements. These features underpin the centre's good capacity to sustain improvement. Staff are well qualified and positive about the work of the centre. Parents appreciate the work of the centre; as one parent stated, 'I don't know where I would be without them.'

Despite much good work the centre does not routinely use data to assess the impact of its activities on families within its reach area, particularly target families. Management information is collected from 16 centres within Islington with reports made available for a wide range of users. The centre makes variable use of the information provided by the local authority.

Safeguarding arrangements are good with careful attention to risk assessment for every activity. Children and other users are kept safe in the centre. Centre staff use the Common Assessment Framework frequently, thereby ensuring the needs of families, often in times of crises, are met. The close partnership working between centre staff and other agencies is crucial in improving the safety of users.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Drive improvements further by working with the local authority to develop a process which clearly evaluates the impact of centre activities, especially for target groups
- Increase the opportunities for parents to influence the life and development of the centre by increasing parents' involvement, particularly in the parent forum, the advisory board or as volunteers.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Outcomes for users of the centre are good overall. Close partnership working ensures the centre is having an outstanding impact on community health. Breastfeeding rates at six to eight weeks are improving significantly and have

increased to 73.9%, well above the national rate of 45.7%. The centre works exceptionally well with the local midwife to encourage breastfeeding within the centre as well as in local stores.

The behaviour of children is good. Staff are skilled at encouraging parents to use strategies they have been shown on courses that result in positive parenting. All users at the centre are kept safe due to the high priority given to all safeguarding matters. Staff are vigilant and safe working practices are constantly reinforced by detailed risk assessments of activities. Parents report that they feel safe at the centre; as one parent reported, 'You can relax and enjoy being with your child because you know it's safe here.' Centre staff monitor carefully all families and use the Common Assessment Framework process effectively.

Children's achievement is improving well. In the Early Years Foundation Stage profile the proportion of children achieving 78+ scale points has risen from 44.1% in 2009 to 55.7% which is just below the national average. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and the rest has reduced significantly. At 30.8% the gap is narrower than the national average at 31.4%.

Users make a positive contribution to the running of the centre, for example through their feedback following activities. However, there are few structured opportunities for parents to contribute to the centre's decision-making, for example as members of the advisory board. Economic well-being for parents is improving significantly. Good work is being done to support individuals working towards qualifications and employment. Adults benefit from the work of a member of staff specifically employed to support those seeking employment. Almost 20% of adults engaged in activities at the centre have already obtained employment; additionally, a high proportion has significantly improved their employment chances due to the centre's effective interventions.

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	1
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

Over 70% of families within the reach area access centre activities. The centre is located in an excellent position within the community, adjacent to a busy main road, yet overlooked by high-rise tenement blocks. One parent captured the thoughts of many when she said, 'This place is like an oasis in a desert'; another said, 'It's like the Tardis with the outside play area...it just goes on forever'. The integration of professionals from other agencies visiting the centre is so discreet they are able to observe and assess families' needs during naturally occurring activities. The confidence of parents and children has increased significantly. As one parent put it, 'I now know how to play with my child.'

The learning and development opportunities provided for children are well planned and they make good progress. The centre is full of brightly coloured works of art produced enthusiastically by children of all ages. Staff have high expectations of all users who flourish as a result. Activities are well organised with all staff clearly committed to helping families succeed. There are several men working at the centre in a variety of roles who provide good role models for both the children and parents. A flourishing fathers' group is keen to engage with other males from target groups who live in the community to support one another and share experiences. Participation rates and attendance levels on all courses are good. The centre's outreach workers are very effective in working with specific groups such as teenage mothers and minority ethnic communities.

Support, advice and guidance given to all families are outstanding. Managers, visiting agencies and staff strive to ensure that everyone who enters the centre is encouraged to participate in all it has to offer. From the moment a person first enters the centre discreet assessment of the needs of every individual takes place.

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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management are good. Equality of opportunity is outstanding with services meeting the needs of all exceptionally well and enabling good and improving outcomes. The centre has a wonderfully warm and friendly environment. There is particularly sensitive work relating to children with disabilities; for example, staff

create story books which illustrate very well how others can communicate with children with autism using the centre.

Senior managers are well supported by the local authority and the advisory board. Managers are very effective at maintaining morale among staff and supporting them to perform well in their various roles. The acting centre manager is clearly focused and enthusiastic about the work of the centre. Good use was made of a staff training day that involved all staff, as well as members from other agencies, in contributing to developing the accurate self-evaluation report. Staff and partners are clear about the centre's strengths, weaknesses and future priorities and this demonstrates its good capacity to improve.

Very good use is made of the wide range of resources available. The cluster model aligning the centre with two other centres allows resources to be shared for the benefit of users, thereby ensuring value for money is good. However, data are not always used as well as they could be to inform the centre about how effective its activities are in engaging with all target families within its reach area.

Partnership working is good. Users benefit from the many activities being run at the centre. Staff are confident when directing users to other agencies, knowing that their needs will be addressed. Safeguarding is good. All legal requirements in relation to safeguarding are adhered to. Robust risk assessments ensure all activities conducted are run safely. Families who are most in need receive good support during their time of crisis through the effective use of the Common Assessment Framework. Staff's knowledge of safeguarding ensures that families receive the support they need at the time they need it most.

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	1
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

<p>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</p>	<p>2</p>
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The recent inspection findings at Willow Children's Centre: EY131749 were used to inform this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Willow Children's Centre on 19 – 20 September 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

As part of the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation, and talked with a range of children and adults including parents, staff, and partnership representatives. We were pleased to speak to some of you about the centre's work and to listen to your views. We really enjoyed talking to you around the centre and in the various activity sessions you were engaged in. You expressed your views very clearly and we appreciated your 'straight talking' in telling us how things really are.

Outcomes at the centre are good and in particular the work the centre does to improve your health is outstanding. The centre provides good support to you and your families through the range of good quality activities and services it has on offer. Careful attention is given to ensure you and your children stay safe. The way the centre offers you excellent care, guidance and support during times of crisis is particularly noteworthy. We were delighted to hear how you have benefited from coming to the centre, increased your confidence and become involved in the many worthwhile activities available to you.

The centre is also good at helping you increase your knowledge about how children learn through the many play activities and parenting sessions. The centre offers a range of good support to new mums to breastfeed their babies and to give them the best start in life. As a result of the support offered, breastfeeding rates are increasing well and the number of you still breastfeeding after a six to eight week period is really promising.

The acting centre manager is clearly focused and enthusiastic about the work of the centre. She is well supported by senior managers from the local authority. Centre

staff work very hard to make the centre as good as it can be. They have innovative ideas to improve what they do so that more families can benefit from its activities.

Governors and the advisory board act as an effective critical friend and challenge the centre to do even more. The centre sets targets in order to improve services to you, although not all targets are precise enough for the centre to easily measure its success. We have asked the centre to work with the local authority to find ways of measuring the impact of its activities, especially with its most vulnerable families. We have also asked the centre to develop its work with parents, helping you to become volunteers and members of the parents' forum and advisory board so that you can influence activities at the centre more effectively.

It is pleasing to find that you feel welcome at the centre. The inclusion of all children and families is outstanding and the centre is a pleasure to visit. All of you, regardless of background, aptitudes or other differences, have equal access to the centre. We are also encouraged to hear that you feel the centre is a safe place to bring your children. As one parent said, 'The centre is somewhere to bring my children and I know it's safe.' It was also good to learn about how those of you who have undertaken training have increased your confidence and developed your skills, which should help you find employment in the future.

Thank you once again for your welcome and your willingness to share your views with us. We can see why the staff enjoy working with you so much and wish you every success in the future.

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