

# Acacia Children's Centre

230 Grove Road, Mitcham Eastfields, CR4 1SD

## Inspection dates

Previous inspection date

8–9 July 2014

Not previously inspected

Overall effectiveness	This inspection: Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
		Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Outstanding	1
The quality of practice and services		Outstanding	1
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This children's centre is outstanding.

- The centre is an extremely vibrant community venue where everyone feels welcome. This is reflected by the fact that all children aged under five in the area served by the centre are registered, most of them accessing services and a large majority coming regularly.
- Senior leaders have given careful thought to identifying the groups that need most support. These groups are extremely well involved because services are designed directly to meet their needs. For example, all of the children in the least advantaged areas who have been assessed as needing additional support have used the centre six times or more in the last 12 months.
- The centre has been exceptionally successful in supporting adults in the community. A very substantial number has increased their educational, language and parenting skills. Outcomes for these families are excellent. For example, 70% of Job Club members have been supported to get back to work.
- Children who attend the centre make excellent progress because sessions are planned to meet their needs. Highly effective links with the on-site pre-school, that provides funded education for 40 two-year-olds, and with the adjacent Lonesome Primary School mean that children are very well prepared for school. Detailed tracking of children's progress when the children move on shows the very positive impact of the centre's work.
- Leadership, governance and management at all levels are outstanding. The centre manager's professionalism and the highly committed staff have carried the centre remarkably well through a very significant period of change.
- The centre is very ably supported by the local authority, particularly in relation to monitoring and providing data and information to track those attending and the outcomes for children. No one involved with the centre is complacent; as such, the centre has an outstanding capacity to continue to improve.
- The knowledgeable members of the locality advisory board provide high levels of support and challenge. At present, however, not enough families are represented on this body. The centre recognises that the parent forum does not yet fully represent families from the recently extended area it now serves.

## What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Encourage more families to be directly involved with the running of the centre by:
  - developing the parents' forum so that a wider range of families attends
  - ensuring that a detailed record is kept of parent forum meetings to show the part families play in running the centre and how this is passed on to the locality advisory board
  - encouraging more centre users to attend the locality advisory board meetings.

## Information about this inspection

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

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and other staff, several representatives from the local authority and the locality advisory board. They met with a wide range of partners including those from health services, schools, charities and community organisations, such as the South-West London Tamil Welfare Group.

Inspectors visited several activities taking place during the inspection, including the Job Club and Toddle and Talk. They also observed a childminders' session that was held at Ivy Gardens Outreach Centre. A joint observation of Stay and Play was undertaken with the deputy centre manager.

They looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation and action plan, a sample of case studies and safeguarding policies and procedures. The centre manager and local authority representatives attended all the inspection team meetings.

## Inspection team

Joan Lindsay, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Libby Dickson	Additional Inspector
Graham Saltmarsh	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

Acacia Children's Centre is a standalone centre that was first designated in 2010. The centre is managed directly by the local authority. There is a locality advisory board in place. Services are delivered from a large community building located between Lonesome Primary School and St Mark's Academy. A pre-school, providing funded early education for two-year olds, is located in the building, but is not managed by the centre. The schools and the pre-school are subject to separate inspections. The reports can be found at [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). Services are also delivered from Ivy Gardens and St Mark's Outreach Centres, as well as from the Pollards Hill Estate and several other community venues such as local libraries.

Following a locality reorganisation in the local authority, the centre has experienced significant operational and management change since December 2013. This resulted in an expansion of the area served by the centre, a single management structure, the transfer of staff from Ivy Gardens and St Mark's Outreach Centres from schools to the local authority, and a pooling of budgets.

The area served by the centre includes 21 separate defined localities, two of which are considered to be in the top 10% most disadvantaged compared to the rest of the country, with a further 10 in the top 30%. Minority ethnic births account for 79% of the local total. The percentage of children under five living in workless households is 27%, which is above national averages and well above the borough level of 15%. Children generally enter the Early Years Foundation Stage at levels slightly below those expected for their age.

The centre has identified priority groups needing most support as: families living in the less advantaged areas of Eastfields and Pollards Hill; families with children aged up to five living in those two areas who are assessed as needing additional support; families with children aged up to two living in the wider area served by the centre that is considered to be in the 30% most disadvantaged nationally.

### Inspection judgements

#### Access to services by young children and families

#### Outstanding

- The centre has set itself highly challenging targets to ensure it meets the needs of local families. Consequently, it has ensured that all children under five are registered and the large majority sustain their involvement. This has been possible because of exceptionally well-established partnerships, especially with health services; 60% of new registrations come from health visitors. This has been achieved despite boundary changes to the area served by the centre, resulting in the inclusion of a far higher number of under fives in less advantaged areas.
- The number of families who access early childhood services, including those who are expecting children, is particularly high because of the regular, extremely well-attended clinics held in the centre. This, coupled with services designed to meet specific needs, such as Toddle and Talk and Ready Steady Go, are highly effective in ensuring the centre's identified priority groups visit regularly.
- Services taken out into the community at venues, such as Ivy Gardens Outreach Centre, and the work of senior family engagement officers, have ensured that families who need most support remain very effectively involved. For example, 85% of under twos who need additional support living in the centre's 12 least advantaged areas have attended six times or more in the last year.
- Most children from families in priority groups take up their entitlement to free early education. The centre has been particularly successful in promoting the take up by eligible two-year-olds. This has been done through enlisting community partners such as the South London Tamil Welfare

Group, local schools and childminders.

- The centre is highly effective in the way it monitors who is using the services to ensure that they meet the needs of those who require them most. This information is used to plan tailor-made sessions and ensure families can make progress, for example through the Job Club or English language classes. Most of the families who come to sessions that are open to all, such as Stay and Play, are from identified priority groups.

### The quality of practice and services

### Outstanding

- Services delivered by or through the centre are consistently of an excellent quality. The highly comprehensive range is designed to meet the specific needs of the community and does so extremely well.
- In the last year, over 870 adults have attended a session to extend their parenting skills, their education or their job prospects, with outstanding outcomes for many families. The longer term impact on adults is tracked in detail. This shows clear progression via courses or other support leading to employment for a substantial number. The volunteer programme is very well structured and ensures that families from priority groups can support the centre in this way. Their achievements are regularly celebrated and their aspirations are developed extremely well through the appointment of parent champions.
- Gaps in children's progress are closing rapidly. The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results for 2013 showed the percentage of local children achieving a good level of development was below national figures. However, the indications are that this has improved substantially in 2014. This is particularly so for children at Lonesome Primary School, where a high number has used the centre. Detailed tracking and discussions with the school verify the extremely positive impact of the work of the centre in preparing children moving on to school.
- Health outcomes are all improving; this is especially the case for babies being breastfed at six to eight weeks of age, where the centre's figures are substantially higher than those for the locality as a whole.
- Excellent quality case files, that include families' assessments of the impact of support they have been given, reflect the professionalism of the senior family engagement officers. The impact is also a consequence of outstanding partnership work. Partners typically state, 'I cannot praise them enough. They are so highly professional and capable.'
- The fortnightly Locality Allocation Network meetings bring together multiple agencies to decide which would best meet a family's specific needs, some of which are highly complex. The centre's very effective use of Common and Shared Assessments (CASAs) and regular information sharing ensure that families' needs are met and children are safeguarded extremely well.
- The centre is a vibrant hub for the whole community. The welcoming central communal area provides a comfortable meeting place and is a wealth of information; it includes access to tablet computers for families to access the internet. The highly popular weekly café, run by the Salvation Army, encourages all ages and backgrounds to mix exceptionally well at the centre.

### The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

### Outstanding

- The centre is extremely well led and managed at all levels. Highly effective input from the local authority has contributed significantly to the outstanding progress the centre has made in a relatively short time. Extremely good support from those producing data for the centre, as well as outstanding partnership working, has also been vital to the progress. What is especially notable is the lack of complacency and the recognition that there will always be different challenges to face.
- The centre's performance is monitored constantly, as are staff at all levels. Professional development is very well structured. A detailed training plan links individual needs to the centre's identified targets and priority groups' requirements. Everyone has a very clear, albeit overly-modest, understanding of the centre's strengths. Specific targets for continued improvement are

agreed with the local authority and very much based on the needs of the local community.

- Safeguarding children and families is at the core of the centre's work. Policies, practices and procedures are very strong. Any concerns are acted on immediately, making use when needed of the excellent links with partners, such as the 0–5 Supporting Families Team for guidance. Consequently, the centre's work with children who are subject to child protection plans, or who are looked after, identified as children in need or supported by a CASA, is exemplary.
- Resources are exceptional. The main building is purpose built and has numerous very spacious and extremely well-equipped rooms, as well as an extensive outdoor area and access to an adventure playground. With open access for the community as a whole, the resources are extremely well used and do much to iron out inequalities in the local area and bring the whole community together harmoniously.
- However, the most vital resource is the staff. Despite the centre undergoing significant changes, leading to almost half the staff being new or having changed their line management, everyone is highly committed to serving the community and supporting families who need it most. This is endorsed by families who typically say, 'I love it here and I love them. I don't know how I would manage without them.'
- Parents feel they have a strong voice in the centre. The 'You said...we did' board in the foyer clearly shows that regular feedback and evaluations capture and act on centre users' views. However, the parents' forum is not yet fully representative of the community. Although there is parent representation on the locality advisory board, the number who attend is relatively low, especially given the expanded area now served by the centre.

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and, as a result, inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

## Centre details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	21610
<b>Local authority</b>	The London Borough of Merton
<b>Inspection number</b>	442864
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	2,542
<b>Centre manager</b>	Tim Wallder
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	0208 274 5121
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:Tim.Wallder@merton.gov.uk">Tim.Wallder@merton.gov.uk</a>

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