

# Meath Gardens Children's Centre

1 Smart Street, Bethnal Green, London, E2 0SN

<b>Inspection date</b>	19–20 May 2015		
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

## Summary of key findings for children and families

### This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- Too few children and families from target groups sustain their engagement in centre services.
- At 50%, the take-up of free early education by eligible two-year-olds is too low.
- The range of opportunities to help parents improve their education and skills is too narrow. Take-up and success rates of courses that are available are relatively low, and only limited tracking has been developed to show how well parents meet their personal goals.
- Positive parenting is promoted well during one-to-one support and in activities, but the lack of appropriate programmes limits the centre's ability to fully meet parenting needs, particularly regarding children's oral hygiene and healthy weight.
- There are currently too few checks on data and too little follow-up of the targets set by the local authority to gauge the centre's performance. Action planning lacks precise success criteria and clear deadlines to guide the rapid pace of improvement that is required.

### It has the following strengths:

- There is a strong culture of safeguarding and effective work to reduce the risk of harm to children.
- Case files are maintained to a high standard and reflect positively on the good quality of family support work.
- Centre activities enhance parents' confidence in helping their children, particularly those disabled, to learn successfully. Parents hold the centre in very high regard.
- The manager has steered the group positively through a challenging year. The staff team is upbeat about the future and keen to help move things forward. The locality stakeholder group composed of partners and parents provides effective governance.
- Strong partnerships are helping the centre to meet its core purpose, provide additional capacity in resources and build for better effectiveness.

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

- Increase the sustained contact of all priority groups so that the large majority access appropriate services until their needs are met. Ensure that staff make an accurate record of who attends services, and capture this on the management information system so that there is a reliable picture of engagement and timely follow-up of those who have registered but not been seen for some time.
- Work with the local authority to improve the quality and timeliness of information made available to the centre to help increase the take-up of free early education by eligible two-year-olds so that most, if not all, benefit from the best start possible at a good or better quality setting.
- Extend the range of further learning and skills training for parents, particularly those from target groups, by:
  - building links with Jobcentre Plus and training providers
  - assessing needs more rigorously
  - ensuring that participation levels are carefully tracked and that information about retention and success rates informs individual needs and future service planning
  - extending volunteering to promote workplace experiences and help more parents prepare for employment.
- Enhance the programmes available to promote parenting skills, particularly in helping improve children's oral hygiene and healthy weight.
- Sharpen the use of data to inform quality assurance processes, particularly the local authority's quarterly monitoring. Ensure that development priorities are identified precisely, with measurable targets set that are reviewed regularly to ensure a good pace of positive change.

## 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. It took place at the same time as the inspection of Mowlem Children's Centre.

This inspection was carried out by two Additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre locality lead, children's centre manager, staff, local authority officers, partners, volunteers, parents and members of the locality stakeholder group.

The inspectors visited play and learning activities held in the centre and case files were sampled together with management audits and supervision records. Inspectors also looked at a wide range of other documentation.

Inspectors took into account parents' views as expressed directly to them during the inspection, as well as through their recorded evaluations about the centre's work.

Centre leaders attended all team meetings.

## Inspection team

Christine Field, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Peter Towner

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

Meath Gardens Children's Centre opened in 2010 as a stand-alone children's centre. It is currently one of 12 children's centres in Tower Hamlets; these are divided into four localities, each with three children's centres. Meath Gardens collaborates with the two other children's centres in the north west locality: Mowlem and Collingwood. Collingwood was inspected in 2011 and Mowlem was inspected at the same time as Meath Gardens. Tate House Playgroup (EYR 435168) shares the building with Meath Gardens, but is inspected under separate arrangements. Reports can be found at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk>.

Meath Gardens is managed directly by the local authority. The centre is supported by the North West Locality Stakeholder Group advisory board for the area and the parent forum; parents attend both. Services provided include activities to promote early learning, family support, child and family health, careers, adult learning and volunteering.

There are 1,307 children under the age of five years living in the area served by the centre. The area has high levels of social and economic disadvantage. Overcrowding is much higher than elsewhere in the borough. Extensive new housing development is taking place and this is seeing a rapidly increasing number of children in need of services. Some 40% of children are of Bangladeshi heritage and comprise the main ethnic group. Approximately 15% are from White British backgrounds; others are from many different ethnic groups or of 'unknown' heritage. The large majority of families speak English as an additional language. Children enter early education provision with skills and knowledge at levels below those typical for their age.

Priority target groups identified by the centre are: two-year-old children eligible for free education, particularly those living in the most disadvantaged communities; children known to social care; children of young parents; and disabled children.

### Inspection judgements

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

Requires improvement

- Access to services requires improvement because too few children and families from target groups sustain regular contact with centre services. For example, data show that of the six in 10 young parents who have registered, only the minority have used the centre more than six times in the last year.
- The centre has identified children living in the most disadvantaged communities as a priority group, but there is only limited information being captured to show how many this involves or the number taking up services and sustaining their engagement in appropriate services.
- Only a quarter of two-year-olds visit the centre regularly. At 50%, the take-up of free early education by those who are eligible is much below the level seen elsewhere in London or nationally. It is in stark contrast to the 90% take-up of places by three- and four-year-olds.
- Detailed information to help the centre follow up those families with two-year-olds not using their entitlement has been slow to come through. However, staff try their best to help parents find suitable places such as at the co-located playgroup. The local authority has identified a shortfall in good quality places as demand increases.
- Effective multi-agency working means that the centre is aware of which children are known to social care, including those disabled. The very large majority of these engage well with the centre and benefit from well-integrated early help and support.
- The centre does not receive live birth data, but the good partnership with health professionals helps the centre to make early contact with parents-to-be and their new babies. At 97%, registrations show that most families know about the centre and are aware of what is on offer.

**The quality of practice and services**

Requires improvement

- Too few children and families use the centre's good quality services regularly and this requires improvement. For example, few parents take up the opportunities available to enhance their education, parenting and employability skills, and there are only limited checks to find out how well those that do participate get on.
- Courses are available for parents to improve their English language skills or help manage their finances, while a few take advantage of skills-based courses such as plumbing. Information shows that relatively low numbers register for courses and only half of those who start complete them. Currently there is no active partnership with Jobcentre Plus to support this priority aspect. A community development officer has recently been appointed to help drive improvements.
- Parenting skills, including positive behaviour management techniques, are well promoted by staff during the activities they run, such as 'Play and Learn'. Some parents are referred to 'Baby Massage' sessions to strengthen family bonds, while others benefit from one-to-one support in their home or participate in first-aid courses that enhance their understanding of keeping children safe. However, there is no clear strategy for supporting parenting skills and raising parents' awareness about their responsibilities for children's well-being, particularly oral hygiene and healthy weight.
- Children are helped to learn successfully during activities such as 'Family Play and Learning'. Well-maintained profiles on target children, including disabled children and those with special educational needs, show that most make good progress from low starting points. Strong partnership work with the co-located playgroup has enabled 36 children to make a smooth transition, with over half receiving intensive support to prepare them for their next stage of education.
- Family support work helps many families overcome the personal challenges they face. Case files are maintained to a high standard. The reflective practice meetings led by the link social worker are a positive feature in promoting best practice. Audits are carried out regularly, supported by regular staff supervision, to ensure that targeted work is having a positive impact on reducing inequalities and improving families' lives.
- Care, guidance and support are good. A wide range of information is clearly displayed with up-to-date details about where to go for specialist help and advice on a range of issues, including domestic abuse and mental health. Parents value highly the warm, friendly and inclusive welcome they receive. 'The centre is a life saver', 'Talking Toddlers really helped my child's speech and language development' and 'The Discover Me course empowered me and built my confidence' are some of the many views centre users shared with inspectors.

**The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**

Requires improvement

- The centre is aware of its strengths and weaknesses and recognises that last year staff changes and absences, together with shortfalls in data, were the key barriers to improving the centre's effectiveness at the pace required. Things are moving in the right direction, as reflected in the rising registrations. Nevertheless, more focus is still required on setting challenging, measurable and achievable targets for improvement and reviewing at regular intervals how effectively they are being met.
- The local authority monitors the centre's performance by various means, including the use of finances and on-site visits. Useful guidance is in place to inform the quarterly visits made by the link improvement partner. Records show that these meetings are supportive and challenging, but that not all actions are subsequently followed up or data used rigorously to assist the process. The last recorded visit was in November 2014; the centre has waited too long for its next 'health check'.
- Well-forged partnerships with the many agencies working in the community bring added value to the resources available to the centre to meet the very challenging and complex needs of its diverse multi-ethnic community. However, these are not being used to maximum effect in

ensuring that all needs are met well and with good outcomes.

- Partners and parents regularly attend the Locality Stakeholder Group (LSG) set up to assist the governance of the three centres which work in partnership. Managers submit reports which are scrutinised and help the group hold the centres to account. Each centre has its own parents' forum and there are strong and effective links between these and the LSG. Parents' views are listened to and acted on in shaping services, and planning the times and content of activities.
- Safeguarding is given high status in the staff's work with children and families. Policies, practice and procedures meet current requirements. Good attention is given to 'disqualification by association checks' as part of the robust staff vetting. All staff are fully trained in child protection matters, with the exception of e-safety which is in the pipeline.
- Good collaboration with social care and other partners results in a strong safety net of support for children supported by the Common Assessment Framework procedures, children assessed as in need, and those subject to a child protection plan.
- The centre is a bright, stimulating and high-quality environment. Parents really appreciate having so much space both indoors and out for their children to explore and enjoy in safety. Bangladeshi parents told inspectors how much they love the garden and growing vegetables and flowers. Staff are experienced and well qualified and show high levels of dedication and commitment to working in support of children and families and helping the centre build for further success.

**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 well-being 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.

**Children's centre details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	21980
<b>Local authority</b>	Tower Hamlets
<b>Inspection number</b>	455105
<b>Managed by</b>	The local authority
<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	1,307
<b>Centre leader</b>	Paula Holt
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 7364 0349
<b>Email address</b>	paula.holt@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)  
[Store St](#)  
[Manchester](#)  
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2015

