

York Gardens Children's Centre

Lavender Road, Battersea, London, SW11 2UG

Inspection date	12–13 May 2015		
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families	Inadequate		4
The quality of practice and services	Inadequate		4
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management	Inadequate		4

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that is inadequate

- Too few children and families from priority groups use the centre's services. There is very limited follow up to find out why this is, and not enough is done to sustain the engagement of those most in need of support.
- The centre is not proactive in supporting parents of disadvantaged two-year-olds to access their entitlement to free early education.
- Planning, assessment and the checks on the quality of practice and services are all underdeveloped. There is very limited tracking of the progress of children when they take up centre-led activities, and no information is provided about progress by partner-run groups.
- The opportunities for parents to improve their education, skills and economic well-being are too narrow. Courses to promote parenting skills have not run for some time due to staffing problems.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures, including risk assessments, lack rigour. The quality of case file recording is not of a high enough standard.
- The advisory board is not holding the centre fully to account. The local authority helpfully identifies development areas during its quarterly monitoring visits, but does not follow through to see whether action is being taken and required improvements made.
- Data capture, analysis and use are not sufficient to help leaders and those responsible for governance to set measurable targets and allocate resources effectively to improve the outcomes for priority groups.
- Significant changes in leadership and management limit the centre's capacity to improve its effectiveness rapidly enough.

It has the following strengths:

- Registrations are improving, particularly for Somali children and families.
- Parents in receipt of targeted support say how beneficial this is in helping overcome problems.
- Morale is positive and staff are committed to doing their best for families.
- The use of specialist services to support parents' mental health and well-being, and children's speech and language development is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of children and families from all priority groups who use the centre so that at least the large majority sustain their engagement in appropriate services until their needs are met.
- Work with the local authority to find out how many two-year-old children living in the area served by the centre are eligible for free early education, and how many access a place and at which setting.
- Work with early education partners to help parents take up a place for their children at a good or better quality setting so that they receive the very best start to their education.
- Improve the range, quality and impact of services by:
 - quality-assuring the planning, content and delivery of centre activities to make sure that consistently good practice results in improved outcomes for all priority groups
 - establishing a systematic way of assessing and tracking target children's progress during centre- and partner-led activities
 - extending the opportunities for parents to improve their education, employability, volunteering, personal and parenting skills
 - checking that the guidance in place to support case file recording is being met and taking swift action to ensure that any shortcomings are eradicated
 - updating the family support tracker to ensure that all open case files include sufficient information to enable robust management oversight
 - sharpening the detail in the end of file summaries to show the progress made by families following the centre's support, and include parents' and children's views.
- Improve leadership, management and governance by:
 - re-instating the safeguarding audit procedure, last carried out in 2013, to ensure that all policies, procedures and risk assessment practice meet current requirements and that the health and safety of children, families and staff are assured
 - implementing a robust system of self-evaluation which includes the views of staff, advisory board members and partners
 - ensuring that leaders make regular and full use of all available information to: support work to engage more priority groups; check the centre's performance; and assist improvement planning and allocation of resources where they are needed most
 - pressing ahead with implementing the outreach and other centre action plans, reviewing targets and setting very clear deadlines to ensure the centre moves forward quickly
 - ensuring those responsible for governance monitor the centre's performance robustly and take action if improvements required are not being made at a good pace
 - widening parents' involvement in the advisory board and developing its role in holding the centre to account
 - moving swiftly to fill vacant posts and put in place the family support and administration cover required
 - ensuring that all staff have their training needs met and work effectively in realising the centre's priorities.

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 two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the acting centre leader, staff, local authority officers, partners, volunteers, parents and members of the advisory board.

The inspectors visited the Little Ones and the Making the Most of Motherhood sessions held in the centre. The acting centre leader and senior local authority officers attended all team meetings.

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

Inspectors also looked at a wide range of documentation.

Inspection team

Christine Field, Lead Inspector

Additional Inspector

Joan Lindsay

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

York Gardens Children's Centre opened in 2008 and is one of 14 children's centres in Wandsworth. In 2013 it moved from being managed by play services to being managed directly by the local authority. An advisory board is in place to assist governance.

The centre is managed by the acting centre leader, who took up her post six weeks ago. She oversees the work of the assistant leader and a temporary agency early years worker. The posts of outreach worker and administrative support are vacant. There has been no permanent administrative support for over a year. A new acting centre leader, provided by an agency, is due to start work very soon. Services provided include activities to promote early learning, family support, child and family health, careers and adult learning.

There are 920 children under the age of five years living in the area served by the centre, which has very high levels of social and economic disadvantage. All but two of the eight distinct communities that comprise the area are among the 10% most disadvantaged seen nationally. Some 38% of children live in homes where no one is in paid work, and 20% of families are in receipt of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. Families are from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. A high number speaks English as an additional language; the main home languages spoken are Somali, Arabic, French, Bengali and Portuguese. Most children start nursery with skills and abilities below those typical for their age.

Target groups identified by the centre are: two- to four-year-old children eligible for free early education; children from African-Caribbean, Somali and Bangladeshi backgrounds who speak English as an additional language; and, teenage parents. The centre has also identified reducing childhood obesity and promoting positive mental health as two core priorities.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Inadequate

- Only a small minority of children and families from priority groups use the centre's services regularly. Data available from the management information system are not used well enough by leaders to identify which families are attending, and to follow up those who are not. Current staff shortages are recognised as significantly reducing the level of targeted work undertaken with families most in need of support. The outreach plan, which usefully identifies the core actions required to enhance the centre's reach, is not being implemented.
- Staff help some parents to access a free place for their two-year-olds at the co-located nursery; information is shared to support a smooth transition, particularly for disabled children and those with special needs. However, this is not the case for other early education settings in the area served by the centre, because information to identify those eligible is not routinely provided by the local authority. This means that the centre does not know which children are eligible, or who is taking up a place and where.
- Data provided during the inspection show that the quality of over a third of the early education settings in the wards in which the centre is located require improvement, and that a high number of two-year-olds are placed there. The local authority checks to make sure these children achieve well, but information is not shared with the centre. This limits the opportunity for staff to work collaboratively with partners to ensure that wider family needs are being met.
- Registrations are rising and show that 70% of children are signed up for centre services. Over half of those registered are from the most disadvantaged areas, and nine in ten Somali families are known to the centre. However, less than 50% of African-Caribbean families and only one in ten Bangladeshi families are registered. Very few have regular contact with the centre.

The quality of practice and services

Inadequate

- The range of services is inadequate to meet local needs, and the number of children and parents from priority groups accessing services is too low. There are limited checks on the quality of services or the impact they have on reducing inequalities and improving life chances for families most in need. The absence of an outreach family support worker means that there is an imbalance between services available to all and those provided to meet specific needs.
- The useful guidance in place to support case file recording is not being used to ensure that all files are maintained to a high standard. This means that some files lack key information, whilst on others it is not clear if referrals are being followed up. Additionally, end of file summaries do not record the progress made following the centre's help or include parents' or children's views. The family support tracker system that logs all open case files has not been completed since January this year.
- The use of data to help the centre shape its services is not robust. For example, little is known about the teenage parent priority group. An approximation of the number of young parents living locally was identified during the inspection (32), but it is not clear which services they are accessing or what support is required.
- At 69%, the proportion of Reception-aged children who achieved a good level of development last year is above the national average. However, the centre is not able to demonstrate the value it adds to children's learning and development because systems to track their progress are not in place. Centre activities are not sufficiently focused on promoting the prime areas of learning for children who most need support.
- Other than the Basic English course, there are no specific courses running to provide parents with opportunities to improve their education, employability or personal skills, or overall economic well-being. Parents told inspectors how much they enjoyed the sewing group, but this has not run since last July. Previously, parents have been supported through volunteering opportunities to go on to achieve qualifications and paid work. However, there are currently no volunteers.
- Parenting skills are promoted during sessions such as Baby Massage and by those who attend the Parents as Early Education Partners (PEEPs) programme which last ran in November 2014. The specific parenting course, scheduled to be taking place at the time of the inspection, was cancelled due to staffing problems. There is no information available to show whether families from target groups are building positive parenting skills as a result of the centre's support.
- The Boost programme, run in collaboration with health partners, is making a beneficial contribution to improving health outcomes. The level of sustained breastfeeding is well above the level seen nationally. During the last 12 months there have been significant weight reduction and improved body mass index for mothers attending the New Mums to You group.
- Displays around the centre provide very useful information to help parents' understanding of child protection matters such as safe internet use, child exploitation and female genital mutilation. The use of specialist services to support parents' mental health and well-being, and children's speech and language development, is a positive feature of the centre's provision.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Inadequate

- There have been four changes in leadership over the last year or so; this has restricted the centre's ability to improve its effectiveness. On-going staffing issues continue to impede the centre's capacity to improve engagement to a good level and to enhance the quality and impact of services in order to improve the outcomes for priority groups. Resources are not sufficient to help the centre move forward at the rapid pace required.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures, including risk assessments, lack rigour. It is too long since the last audit was carried out to ensure policies and staff training are up to date. Staff vetting checks include staff declaring there have been no substantive changes since their last enhanced disclosure check; however, some of these declarations took place after the initial vetting deadline had passed.
- There is regular sharing of information with social care staff. Multi-agency planning meetings take place regularly to enable all appropriate agencies to meet and explore cases held in common. Records show convincingly that families identified as being in need, receive early help assessments and that appropriate care plans are in place for children in need, those looked after or subject to

child protection.

- Self-evaluation processes are not well embedded, and the actions identified by the local authority's monitoring visits are not followed up. Well-conceived action plans have been drawn up, but are not implemented because of staff shortages or the lack of experience of permanent staff. For example, the Locality Teacher Plan prioritises school-readiness; but, currently, there is no teacher in place to guide development and permanent staff are not trained in early years provision.
- The re-established advisory board, which is chaired by a parent, is well attended by partners. It is supportive but has yet to develop its critical challenge role. Members have a firm grasp on the challenges facing the centre and are aware of its strengths and where improvement is required. The board recognises that further parental involvement would be beneficial.
- Staff morale is positive despite the many changes, but there is a lack of clear direction. Supervision and performance management systems have recently been re-instated by the acting centre leader, but are not yet embedded. There is no specific training plan established to meet staff's identified professional development needs.
- The centre building is located in the heart of its community and has good quality indoor and outdoor space. The garden and extensive play area are much appreciated, especially by families who live in flats or maisonettes. Parents say their children enjoy planting the vegetables and watching them grow.
- Parents who use the centre hold it in very high regard. Parents in regular contact with the centre told inspectors, 'Staff are fantastic and have done so much for us.' Parents' views are captured on the 'You said - We did' board, and at monthly coffee and chat meetings. The friendly welcome of staff and their dedication to helping parents through very hard times are recognised strengths.

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.

Children's centre details

Unique reference number	23717
Local authority	Wandsworth
Inspection number	455109
Managed by	The local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	920
Acting Centre Leader	Jackie Buckley
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