

South Acton Children's Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101861
Local Authority	Ealing
Inspection number	307829
Inspection date	13 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Linda McGill HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3–5
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	102
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	45
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Simon Hall
Headteacher	Ms Sue Wadhams
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Castle Close Acton London W3 8RX
Telephone number	020 8992 0724
Fax number	020 8896 0468

Age group	3–5
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. They evaluated the centre's overall effectiveness and investigated three issues in particular. These were: to confirm the standards reached by the children and their achievement; to evaluate the impact of the steps taken to ensure consistency in the approach to working with children from six months to four years of age; and to evaluate the impact of the work done to establish the centre's ethos and strengthen leadership and management. To do this, inspectors spoke with the head of centre and senior members of staff, other staff, children, the chair of the governing body and a parent governor. They also looked at the centre's assessment and tracking records and other relevant documents, and analysed responses to the questionnaire for parents. They observed teaching and learning indoors and out. Other aspects of the centre's work were not investigated in detail, but no evidence was found to suggest that the centre's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

South Acton Children's Centre's core offer is care and education for children from six months to five years of age. Most children join the centre at the age of three. The centre also provides services such as after school and holiday play schemes. However, it also offers a great deal more to children, families and the local community, including toy libraries, advice, support and guidance for adults, family and adult learning, health services and support for childminders. Many of these additional services are provided or coordinated by the centre's family and community team.

The centre serves an ethnically and linguistically diverse population. Some families face challenging circumstances. A number of families are refugees or are seeking asylum and this, together with the ongoing refurbishment of the South Acton estate, leads to high mobility. Many of the children are in the early stages of learning English alongside their home language.

The proportion of children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high. The centre makes special provision in three units. One is for children who have difficulties with speech, language and communication, the second is for up to six children who have complex and multiple needs and the third is for up to six children who have autistic spectrum disorder. Other children have difficulties with speech and language, their learning or behaviour.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

South Acton Children's Centre makes a positive difference to the lives of its children and their families. Its overall effectiveness is good. Several aspects of its work are outstanding. Parents were keen to point this out in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, which were universally positive. In particular, they value the time and effort that staff give to making sure that children are safe and well cared for, and appreciate that this helps them to be happy, to thrive and develop. They also greatly welcome the guidance and support they receive to help them understand how to work with their children at home, and the opportunities the centre gives them to pursue their own learning. One parent summed up the views of many, saying, 'My child is learning a lot of things at nursery every day. I would give the nursery all five stars.'

The children's achievement is outstanding. This is because of two important things. First, the children blossom in the positive, supportive environment that the staff create. Children explore many exciting things indoors and out. They have plenty of time to pursue their interests and to play and work happily alongside other children and adults. Many excursions in the local area broaden their horizons; for example, during this inspection children visited a pet shop and were very excited about the purchase of Sarah and Yusuf, as they named their new goldfish. Second, teaching is good and is sometimes outstanding. From the babies through to the oldest, the adults know the children well. They use this knowledge to make sure that what they plan helps children take the next steps towards their targets. When they start at the centre, many of the children have skills and knowledge that are well below what is typical for their age, particularly in their language skills, their ability to take care of their own personal needs and their sociability. They quickly settle in and make great strides in their personal development. They learn to get along with each other, grow in confidence and develop a thirst for learning and curiosity about the world around them. They willingly contribute their ideas and take responsibility for their toys and equipment. By the time children leave to start at primary school, most have made excellent progress and their attainment in all the areas of learning is broadly in line with what is expected of four-year-olds. They are well prepared to take the next steps in their learning and in life.

Children who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make excellent progress in relation to their starting points and capabilities. Provision in the specialist units is outstanding. The many children who are learning English also make excellent progress. Staff are skilled at modelling language and encouraging children to speak, although they sometimes ask questions which require one-word answers, rather than encouraging children to try to respond in more detail. Staff do not fully capitalise on incidental opportunities that arise to foster children's knowledge of letters and sounds, and to link this with writing. Children and adults sing together a lot; for example, two-year-olds sang happily as they waited for lunch. This is an excellent way of encouraging children to express themselves.

The centre is working towards greater consistency in teaching across all age groups, with some success. These improvements, together with the maintenance of good practice, confirm that the centre has a good capacity to improve further. Staff benefit from exchanging ideas and expertise with one another, increasingly seeing themselves as part of one team. The centre works exceptionally well in partnership with parents and with a wide variety of external agencies. The family and community team plays a significant part in both the life of the centre and in the local community. The centre's contribution to community cohesion is outstanding.

The centre is well led and managed. The head of centre and senior leaders have a clear vision of how they wish to build on current strengths and the strategy is succinctly set out in the centre's improvement plan. The governing body shares their determination to provide the best for children and their families. Training and development activities are under way for several recently appointed governors. All members of staff who work with the children have received the appropriate checks, making sure that children are properly safeguarded. However, the records are not yet held in one single place. The centre has already begun to address this shortcoming.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop staff's skills in asking questions of children, and in taking opportunities to help them link sounds and letters.
- Make sure that the government requirement to keep a single central record is fully met.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
The standards[1] reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of the children in the EYFS promoted?	1

Leadership and management

How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

23 January 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of South Acton Children's Centre, London, W3 8RX

You might remember that some visitors came to your nursery the other day. I'm writing to say thank you very much for letting us watch you working and playing, indoors and outside in your lovely gardens. We liked talking to you and looking at all the pictures of everything that you have been doing.

Your mums and dads told us that your centre is a good place to be. We think they are right. We saw that all the grown-ups look after you very well. They keep you safe and they make sure you have lots of fun things to do. They know how clever you are and what you should be learning next. This helps you to learn new things quickly. We also saw that you are good children and that you have a happy time at nursery.

We have asked the grown ups to make sure that when they talk to you, you have the chance to say as much as you can. We have also asked them to make sure that some important papers are kept safely in one place in the office.

You are lucky to go to such an exciting place as South Acton Children's Centre. We hope that you enjoy the rest of your time there, and then go to big school ready to learn even more.

Yours faithfully,

Linda McGill

Her Majesty's Inspector

P.S. I hope that Sarah and Yusuf the goldfish have settled in to their new home. I know you will be looking after them carefully.