

Acacia Children's Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103030
Local Authority	Waltham Forest
Inspection number	323730
Inspection date	3 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Alan Jarvis

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

Type of school	Nursery
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3-4
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	115
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reverend Ted Kelly
Headteacher	Ms Rosemary Buckland
Date of previous school inspection	3 July 2006
School address	Cecil Road Leytonstone London E11 3HF
Telephone number	020 8558 4444
Fax number	020 8558 4444

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the impact of the changed roles of leaders and managers
- the assessments that are made to help plan effective learning
- the effectiveness of the partnerships with parents and families.

Evidence was gathered from a range of documents, school records, pupil progress data, discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, chair of governors, staff, parents and pupils, observations around the school and responses to the parents' questionnaire. Some aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This Nursery and Children's Centre serves a socially and culturally diverse community whose make-up is continually changing. Most children attend either the morning or afternoon sessions. Forty-four day care places are available for children aged 2 to 5 years. Around one in five is at an early stage of learning to speak English. A small proportion of children have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The majority of these need support for their speech and language difficulties. The school has the Healthy School Award. The Children's Centre provides an increasing range of community services such as specialist advice and support and sessions such as 'Toddler Opportunity Parent Support' which were not inspected.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. The Nursery and Children's Centre provides a bright, clean and stimulating environment where children feel safe and secure and develop good relationships with each other. Staffing levels are good. Care has been taken to ensure that staff represent the ethnic mix of the community, which aids effective communication. Parents are very pleased with the education which is on offer and typically say, 'My child enjoys the Nursery so much he cries at the weekend when he cannot attend', and 'My daughter's progress has exceeded my hopes.'

Teaching is consistently good. This, and the lively and practically based curriculum which focuses on children learning through playing, ensures children make good and sometimes better progress regardless of their ability, background or additional learning needs across all areas of learning. From generally low starting points, children leave the Nursery with standards in line with those expected for their ages in most areas of learning, although standards are below average in reading, writing, linking letter and sounds and problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy. Children with speech and language difficulties make good progress across all areas of learning because of the high emphasis given to speaking and listening throughout the setting. All groups of children make very good progress in their personal, social and emotional development. This is because key workers are particularly skilled in helping children to develop their self-esteem, to care for themselves and to understand what is right and wrong. As one parent wrote, 'The Nursery has changed my shy son into a more confident boy.'

As the Nursery and Children's Centre have grown and been integrated the responsibilities of leaders and managers have, rightly, been shared out to ensure greater impact. This is working well and has helped to build a good capacity to sustain further improvement. A telling example of this is the way in which many areas of the Children's Centre have improved from satisfactory to good since the last inspection. Leaders are much clearer about what they have to do to make the Nursery and Children's Centre run smoothly and ensure any emergencies are dealt with promptly. All staff have a say in identifying priorities in the development plan. This means everyone knows the right priorities for development and the part they have to play in ensuring improvement. For example, staff implement robust approaches to health and safety across the setting to ensure children's safety at all times. Leaders and managers are aware that not all children attend as often as they should. In part, this is because young children are particularly prone to infections. Staff are doing everything they can to work with families that are harder to reach and whose children would benefit from regular attendance, and this is starting to bear fruit. Governors contribute to this work through their community involvement and efficient and effective committee structure. However, their impact is limited because they do not see the school in action often enough and talk to staff about how well developments are proceeding. This makes it difficult for them to gauge the success of the school and how they can best help.

The impact of leaders and managers is best seen in improvements brought to teaching and the curriculum. Good training has ensured that teachers have a good understanding of how young children best learn and develop. Consequently provision is more consistent than it was and is now of a good quality throughout. Children in the Nursery benefit from many lively and well-planned activities that are well matched to their age and cover all areas of the curriculum. Behaviour is good because the children are never bored. There is a good balance between the activities provided inside and in the stimulating outdoor area. Children freely move between activities, play happily on their own or in groups and confidently make decisions about what they want to do next. For example, in one activity younger children from the Children's Centre

collaborated very well with the older children in planning and building their own 'Climbing Course' with wooden bricks and other resources. Other children were seen sharing and talking about the books they had chosen. Art is a strong area of the curriculum. A visiting artist has been very successful in developing children's imagination and creativity. This is seen in their abundant and high-quality work on display. Key workers focus on developing children's speaking and listening skills through stories, singing rhymes and talking about the activities they are engaged in. Good opportunities are provided for children to develop their early reading and writing and mathematical skills in the well-resourced areas set aside for these activities. Nutritious snacks, the four star healthy meals served at lunchtime and the many opportunities for physical activity help children develop a good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles.

Leaders have taken effective action to ensure that key workers observe children regularly to identify what they have achieved and pinpoint their next steps in learning. The information is used consistently well to tailor learning and provide challenging work in most areas of the curriculum. However, not enough observations are made in communication, language and literacy and problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy. This is especially the case early in the school year. This means that in these areas key workers are more uncertain of what each child can and cannot do and the activities provided are sometimes not as challenging as they might be. This acts as a brake on their overall progress, which is good overall but not as quick as it might be.

The Nursery and Children's Centre are rightly known for their welcoming and supportive relationships with families and not just the immediate parents of children. As one parent wrote, 'Staff are very supportive to both parents and children, and staff are always on hand.' School leaders are particularly good at listening to families and helping to resolve any personal issues that affect their lives by pointing them to the appropriate support services in the community. Each Friday the Children's Centre holds a visitors' day at which specialist advice through, for example, the health visitor or outreach workers is made available. The Nursery and Children's Centre promotes equal opportunities and community cohesion well. Together they are reaching out to as many families as possible and going into the community to make the services they provide known more widely. Children learn how to respect each other and understand their differences and appreciate other ways of life that are different from their own.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sharpen children's next steps in learning in communication, language and literacy and problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy.
- Ensure governors check out at first hand how well the school's priorities for development are being implemented.

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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	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
The standards[1] reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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	2
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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

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?	2

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
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

16 June 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Acacia Children's Centre, London, E11 3HF

Thank you for being really helpful, talking to us and showing us all the exciting things you do when we came to visit you recently.

- We really enjoyed watching you building your 'Climbing Course', playing outside on all the equipment and looking at all the wonderful things you had made in art.
- We were very pleased with the way you behaved, got on well with each other and made new friends, especially those who might be a bit shy and cannot talk very much yet.
- We can see you enjoy the healthy food and know why your parents say you even want to attend at the weekend.

Your Nursery and Children's Centre provide you with a good education. All the grown ups help you learn a lot and ensure you are looked after well. However, they want to be even better.

We have asked them to make sure that:

- the teachers make sure that you are working as hard as you can, especially when you learn to read, write and use numbers
- ensure the governors see you working more often so they know exactly how they can help.

Yours faithfully

Dr Alan Jarvis

Lead Inspector