

# Inspection report for Grasmere Nursery & Children's Centre

Local authority	Luton
Inspection number	365786
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Reporting inspector	Alison Cogher AI

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Valerie Thompson
Date of previous inspection	n/a
Centre address	Icknield Way
	Luton
	LU3 2BT
Telephone number	01582 593426
Fax number	01582 593426
Email address	grasmere.nursery.admin@luton.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Grasmere Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare	Tadpoles Baby and Toddler Unit

The inspection of this Sure Start Children's Centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

## Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

An inspection of the maintained nursery was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

This inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff and governors, parents and carers of children, representatives from the health authority and Pre-school Learning Alliance and the network coordinator of the National Childminder Association. The inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Grasmere Children's Centre is located within Grasmere Nursery School. This phase two centre was designated in September 2007 and provides the full core offer of childcare, early learning, health and family support services. It serves a mixed area of housing with some pockets of high and low levels of deprivation. Over 85% of the reach population are of White British heritage with the rest coming from a range of black ethnic minority communities. Very few do not speak English as their first language. The health of families attending the centre is largely good and unemployment levels are generally low. The qualification levels of parents using the centre are typically just above that found in the area as whole and the uptake of the Working Tax Credit is high. Most children enter childcare and early education with skills that are expected for their age. Governance is provided by the local authority, alongside the school governing body. A service level agreement with the Pre-school Learning Alliance supports the setting with monitoring and development.

## Inspection judgements

**Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

### Overall effectiveness

**The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

**The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management**

**3**

## Main findings

Grasmere Nursery and Children's Centre provides satisfactory support for children and families. Those who attend the centre benefit from good quality care and support. The advice and guidance they receive helps them to improve the outcomes for their children and themselves. Specifically tailored support meets the needs of individual families well. All those spoken to were enthusiastic about the centre's provision. Comments such as 'Staff are genuine, it feels like my family' and 'There is a good range of activities and it gives me ideas about how to support my child' were typical of the positive views expressed.

During 'Stay and Play' sessions children and adults enjoy playing and learning together. The centre provides a warm and friendly environment in which parents and carers get along together well. They use these sessions to share experiences and to support each other. Friendships are forged that extend beyond the centre with 'The Mums Group' being particularly strong. Well qualified, knowledgeable and approachable staff are trusted by parents and carers. Their advice and support in addressing a range of parenting and welfare concerns are actively sought and acted on. Good attention is paid to the safety of the centre environment and the specific activities provided. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory overall, although those users with learning difficulties and / or disabilities and those who do not speak English as their first language are well provided for.

Outcomes for users are satisfactory. Activities are appropriately matched to the needs of those who attend the centre. Children make steady progress and behave well. Procedures for tracking the development and progress of children are not systematic so the centre is unable to evidence the real impact of the provision made for them. Discussions with users and case study evidence show that the centre's provision is having a good impact on some children, adults and families. For example, support for mums with the weaning of their breastfed babies is successful. Signposting arrangements to Jobcentre Plus are sufficiently developed to support adults back to work. Recently developed links with a Next Steps Adviser is supporting

adults to review their careers and consider options for their future employment.

The centre has limited access to data about its reach area, and in particular key health authority data. Consequently it is unable to confidently demonstrate the success of activities in terms of the impact they have on outcomes for children and adults. Evidence to show that all vulnerable groups are accessing centre activities is similarly limited. Activities held in the centre support health outcomes such as breastfeeding, weaning and the reduction of tooth decay, but how this is a reflection of the reach area is not known by the centre.

Users' views are sought via session evaluations, questionnaires and parent focus groups. The centre has started to analyse the information gathered. This has guided changes made to provision such as the forming of the 'Under 1's group' which runs on the same principles as the 'Stay and Play' but is adapted to better meet the needs of babies. Parent governors, although new to their role, are already providing the centre with valuable information about the community it serves.

Increasing user numbers and the development of new activities as a response to evaluation information illustrates the centre's satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement. The centre's improvement plan is integrated into that of the Nursery School whose governors have overall responsibility for both settings. The consequence of this is that it is not clear which priorities specifically relate to the children's centre. Success criteria are identified but these are too broad to allow the centre to confidently measure how well it is progressing towards achieving them. Monitoring of the centre's work as a whole and of the progress towards achieving the improvement priorities is not planned with sufficient clarity to enable the centre to assess the impact of activities and actions. This is further hindered by the lack of basic reach area data. The centre receives well targeted monitoring and development advice through the service agreement with the Pre-school Learning Alliance.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Work with the local and health authorities to ensure that the centre has access to data for the reach area that will enable it to:
  - identify groups whose circumstances make them vulnerable and target its resources to support them
  - evaluate the impact of its provision on outcomes for children and adult users.
- Ensure the centre's development plan identifies key improvement priorities that are defined by clear, challenging and measurable success criteria.
- Clarify and implement the procedures for monitoring and evaluating the centre's progress towards achieving its priorities for improvement.
- Develop a system for recording the progress of children attending the centre

over time so the impact of the centre's provision on their outcomes can be evaluated.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>3</b>
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Growing vegetables through involvement in the Nourishing Neighbourhoods project, and fruit and vegetable tasting activities during 'Stay and Play' sessions promote healthy eating well. Activities such as these have a good impact directly on users' lifestyles. For example, one parent stated that they bought blueberries as a result of them being available during a tasting session at the centre. Good access to outdoor activities, such as wheeled toys and footballs, promote children's physical development and fitness levels well. The centre actively promotes the use of drinking cups specifically designed to support the weaning of breastfed babies which is helping to lower the levels of infant tooth decay by reducing the use of bottles of juice.

Users are confident that the centre is a safe and secure environment where they are able to share their concerns with staff. Systems for working with the centre's key partners to support families who are the most vulnerable because of their circumstances are effective. Children subject to the Common Assessment Framework are monitored closely. Case studies show that some users, such as those who have experienced issues related to drug or alcohol abuse, or have been subject to domestic violence have received effective support. Targeted support for individuals that includes parenting advice is provided when needed and has resulted in positive outcomes being noted for both children and their parents and carers. Health visitors promote local home safety equipment schemes although the impact of this work has not been evaluated fully.

Those who attend the centre value it as a place to meet and to seek help if they need it. Comments such as 'It is great to know you are not alone' shows how they appreciate the support they receive. Users regularly contribute to the evaluation of activities and the centres' overall provision and practice. Children are keen to engage in activities and play happily. There is some evidence to indicate that they make good progress in their personal and social development. When necessary, the centre works with parents to help them manage their children's behaviour and remarks such as 'My child's social development has improved' demonstrate the success of this work. Children who regularly attend sessions such as 'Stay and Play' develop good levels of confidence and move between activities independently of their parents or carers. Children's communication skills are supported through a variety of activities including access to books and role play areas, but their progress is not monitored closely so the impact of this provision on outcomes is not clear. Few parents who attend the centre require significant support with training but those who request it are signposted to training and adult education provision. The centre is aware that it does not follow up this work to evaluate how effective it has been and to check if more access to adult training is required in the reach area.

*These are the grades for the outcomes for users*

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>3</b>

### **How good is the provision?**

**3**

Procedures for monitoring outcomes for children, adults and families lack cohesion. They are limited by the lack of reach data available to the centre in respect of, for example, immunisation and smoking cessation rates. Staff are quick to identify those children and adults who may need additional support. Working with parents and carers, staff monitor closely children who are causing concern and, if necessary, seek and act on specialist advice and support. Growing links with the local Under Fives Special Educational Needs Team is ensuring that children who need additional support are being helped to access it earlier. This is contributing to improved outcomes for them.

The needs of adult users are not systematically researched but when a need is identified the centre works quickly to address it. Support for adult users is often tailored to their individual needs. For example, new mothers who may be experiencing difficulties with breastfeeding or weaning are helped by the centre and visiting health authority staff. Support is provided in the home if this is felt to be appropriate. Some adults have successfully moved into employment having gained childcare qualifications working in the attached nursery.

The centre provides an appropriate range of services and activities for those who attend the centre. Participation rates are steady and for some activities, such as Baby Massage, they have increased. Health-related services such as the child health clinic, developmental checks and the weaning programme are valued and well attended. The limited access to health authority information restricts the centre's ability to know and work towards meeting the needs of all potential users in the reach area. Outreach work is currently very limited although the centre's family worker links with

health visitors to complete some visits in response to referrals or specific requests.

Sessions run by the centre are purposeful and engage children and adults well. Activities are well resourced and support children in active learning. Support from staff helps children and parents and carers to participate confidently in a range of new and varied experiences. Monitoring and assessment is not rigorous enough to provide the information needed to ensure the planning of sessions provides children with a good level of challenge, or to support the centre's evaluation of its provision.

Support for families in times of crisis is good. The centre works closely with a number of agencies, including social care, to ensure support is well matched to families' specific needs and is sustained for as long as it is required. Childcare services provided are of good quality. In addition, there are well established signposting arrangements to health service support, training and employment programmes and advice. Parents and carers spoken to during the inspection were especially positive about the care and support they receive from centre staff. They consider that staff listen to them and make them feel valued. The centre is aware that it has not firmly established links with some users in the reach area to ensure that it is engaging with families who are made vulnerable by their circumstances.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>2</b>

### **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

Governance arrangements are defined and known to all. Each separate agency supervises its own staff although this process is not fully aligned to the centre's management process. Good relationships ensure that the day to day governance and management of the centre is satisfactory. Teamwork between centre staff is a strength and there is a shared commitment to the improvement of the centre. Developing integrated provision has been an appropriate focus over the last two years. Key partners are engaged with the centre, although it is acknowledged there are insufficient links at a strategic level, particularly over the sharing of data and other information.

The centre uses information gathered from users and partners to guide its improvement planning. Support from the Pre-school Learning Alliance is helping the centre to refine and refocus its monitoring and evaluation practices. To date, procedures to monitor the centre’s work have not been sufficiently organised or rigorous to provide clear information about the quality of services provided and the impact they have on outcomes for users. The lack of reach data hinders this process. The improvement plan identifies broad aims but direct links to the centre’s practice and to measurable success criteria are lacking. Resources are deployed appropriately to achieve satisfactory value for money. The centre has too little reach information to ensure that, over the longer term, it is able to target its resources precisely at those users in greatest need.

Services commissioned by the centre, such as provision of childcare at the Tadpoles Baby and Toddler Unit, are of good quality. The centre takes note of users’ views and ideas as it works to adapt its provision to reflect their needs. For example, a recent leaflet drop has been carried out in an attempt to identify and engage families not currently attending the centre. The centre’s promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. All users are welcomed and treated fairly and those who attend the centre report high levels of satisfaction for the sessions they attend. Support for children and adults with disabilities is sensitive and well managed. However, because of the limited information about the community served by the centre it is difficult for staff to evaluate how effectively it reflects and meets the needs of the community.

Safeguarding policy and practice are good and understood by all. Child protection training is up-to-date and procedures to ensure all staff are suitable to work with children are carried out rigorously. Effective working practices with other agencies ensure children and families at significant risk are well supported. Health and safety issues are checked well with good attention being paid to identifying the potential risks of activities and how these can be minimised.

Partnership working is of variable quality. Strong links with the National Childminding Association ensure that childminders have regular opportunities to attend training held at the centre. This helps to improve the quality of childminding available in the area. Health staff work closely with centre staff during Baby Clinic and developmental check sessions to share information or concerns. Centre staff respond quickly to referrals from doctors and other health and social care professionals. Signposting to key partners such as Jobcentre Plus and the Midwifery Service is well established. Working practices with the local, and health authority are not close enough to ensure the centre has enough information to deliver services fully reflect reach area needs.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is</b>	<b>3</b>

<b>integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision</b>	<b>3</b>

## **Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection**

The inspectors took into account the inspection findings for linked provision that took place at the same time as the children's centre inspection. The overall effectiveness of Grasmere Nursery School, that includes the Tadpoles Baby and Toddler Unit, was judged to be good.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Summary for centre users**

We inspected the Grasmere Nursery & Children's Centre on 10–11 March 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for making us feel welcome and helping us to find out about your children's centre. We appreciated the time you took to talk to us in small groups and during sessions such as 'Stay and Play'. You gave us lots of helpful information and we are pleased to hear that you value and enjoy the centre activities and services. You told us how the centre has helped you in a number of ways. These included

your developing confidence and understanding so that you can enjoy learning and play with your children more often. You value the advice and support you receive from centre staff and the friendships you make with other parents by attending centre activities. The centre helps you to keep your children healthy, and a number of you told us how much you have enjoyed growing vegetables and tasting fruit at the centre. You told us that you and your children feel safe at the centre. We judge that safeguarding and safety at the centre are good. The centre works well with other services to help families experiencing particularly difficult times.

Staff at the centre and those who visit to provide particular sessions work well together. This supports children's development and helps adults to gain confidence and learn new skills. Children make satisfactory progress overall, and some make good progress in their personal and social development. We have asked the centre to check on your children's progress more carefully so that they can provide activities that will help them learn even more. The care, guidance and support you receive from the centre is good. Some of you spoke to us about the specific help you had received to access services linked to health and those providing support for children with special needs. This personal support helps you to manage any concerns you may have about your children.

The centre works appropriately with a number of partners such as health, social care and employment agencies like Jobcentre Plus. Arrangements for you to access the services you need are established and centre staff are able to help you with your enquiries. Some of the centre's links with the agencies are not strong enough to enable it to have the information it requires to provide the services that are right for your community. We have asked the local authority to work with the health authority to make sure that the centre has sufficient information. The centre has an improvement plan but it is not produced in a way that allows it to check on how well it is doing. We have asked the centre's leadership to work with its partners to identify clear priorities for improvement. We have also asked leaders to make sure that progress towards achieving the priorities is monitored closely. Your views and ideas are valued and used to guide the work of the centre. The setting up of the 'Under 1's' session was made in response to your request and is a good example of how you can contribute to the work of the centre.

It was a pleasure to meet you and your children and we thank all of you who found the time to talk to us. We wish you and your families all the best for the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).