

Inspection report for Low Hall Nursery School and Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Waltham Forest
Inspection number	366540
Inspection dates	23–24 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Paul Edwards

Centre governance	The governing body
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Date of previous inspection	No previous inspection
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Linked school if applicable	Low Hall Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	None

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.

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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.

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

The inspectors held meetings with centre users, headteacher, coordinator and staff, outreach workers, partners and representatives of the local authority. They visited the childcare provision at the Nursery School and the extended services based at Queens Road Community Centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Inspection judgements

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

Low Hill Nursery and Children's Centre was opened in 2006 and its governance is undertaken by the governing body of what was previously Low Hall Nursery School. Governors from the school sit on the advisory board. It is lead and managed by the headteacher of Low Hill Nursery and Children's Centre School. The centre occupies rented accommodation comprising a large hall, which is divided into two community rooms, an area used as a crèche and an outside play area. Before- and after-school care for children who attend the Nursery School is also managed by the children's centre. The Nursery was inspected in March 2009.

The centre provides all elements of its core offer. The centre works with a number of agencies to bring linked services to the local community. This includes integrated childcare and early learning, health services, outreach and family support.

The centre serves an area that has been identified as highly disadvantaged. A significant number of children live in workless households who claim out-of-work benefits. Areas within the centre's catchment are in the top 10% most deprived in England. The area has a large number of families from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. The population is highly mobile and there has been an increase in

new communities from Eastern Europe and China. Most children enter early years provision with levels of attainment that are well below those expected.

Overall effectiveness

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Low Hall is an outstanding children’s centre. A significant strength of the centre is the exceptionally well-coordinated partnerships that ensure the needs of its users are met extremely effectively. The centre users are overwhelmingly pleased with the activities and sessions on offer, identifying many positive features. For example, many commented on the way the play activities are organised and the effect this has on the behaviour of their children. They are extremely pleased with how the sessions help to improve their children’s social skills, helping them to learn to take turns and to share toys with the new friends they make. A number of users commented on how the regular ‘Play and Stay’ sessions had taught them how to use play activities to help their children at home so strengthening their relationships as well as improving children’s development. The centre has a very clear understanding of the needs of its users through the excellent multi-agency meetings. Consequently, it has implemented activities that are closely tailored to the needs of its users. The successful classes teaching English to users who are at a very early stage of learning English as an additional language, for example, are greatly valued, enabling them to access essential health services in addition to developing their confidence when shopping.

The centre is keenly aware of the need to ensure everyone is kept well informed about what is on offer. The use of the ‘Play Bus’, leafleting addresses, flyers, and high profile staff within the community all help to raise awareness and the profile of the centre. It is consistently seeking ways to encourage more users to contribute their views. Users are confident that any suggestions or concerns are dealt with. For example, the Saturday morning sessions for fathers and male carers and children has resulted in a number of additional activities taking place. The kite making is remembered fondly by many and they say how they value the opportunity to take part in the development of their children through such organised activities. The advisory board plays an important part in identifying the needs of the users. As regular visitors and users of the facilities, members meet with other users, taking note of their suggestions.

The centre’s leadership has outstanding drive and ambition. It is deeply aware of its strengths and focuses most effectively on improving those areas it has identified can

be improved further. Very well targeted professional development ensures all staff have excellent skills to deliver the centre's services. Its capacity for further improvement is excellent, as exemplified by its response to its searching self-analysis, resulting in tailored sessions for its most vulnerable users. It has gathered a large amount of data, both at local authority level and about the reach area. It uses this data most effectively to target resources and activities. However, it acknowledges the need to interrogate data more fully to determine the longer-term impact of initiatives, for example on areas such as smoking cessation. Parents of those children who attend the before- and after-school care sessions at the nursery school are very happy with the provision and how the centre ensures children are very well looked after. Outreach activities are successful in engaging with potential users in various ways and particularly through their presence in the health centre.

The centre is successful at engaging and involving users with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who are potentially vulnerable, have little or no understanding of English and those who have recently moved to the area. For example, the increasing number of families from Chinese backgrounds greatly value the English language sessions which enable them to integrate into the community more easily. Users express how well the centre works to enable the many different ethnic and social backgrounds to interact and work well together. Excellent safeguarding practices across the centre's venues ensure users are well looked after and cared for. Regular multi-agency and multi-disciplinary meetings ensure there are early interventions to support those in need. There are very strong links with a number of voluntary organisations that provide additional support and guidance for users.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Identify the longer-term impact of services and activities by interrogating further the data that is now becoming available.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Parents and carers really value the opportunity to access health support when attending with their children. A number of parents commented on how parenting courses were helping them. For example, they commented on how their children's behaviour had improved during the play and crèche sessions and how their behaviour was improving at home. One parent commented on how she now felt able to take the children out into the park and was no longer embarrassed by their behaviour. She also stated that her life had been changed, gaining confidence, no longer taking medication and was working for the first time. Another expressed her gratitude for the massaging skills she had been taught which were so important

when her child had to undergo emergency hospital treatment. She was allowed to massage her child while she was in intensive care and this enabled her to retain the parental bond. Good levels of mental health are promoted by encouraging parents and carers to relax and learn during the 'Stay and Play' and 'Messy Day' sessions. Opportunities for the families to visit places of interest, such as Stratford, help to reduce stress levels and reduce the sense of isolation. There are excellent opportunities for users to access information or meet counsellors who will provide advice on stopping smoking and reducing reliance on drugs and alcohol.

Children attending the before- and after-care sessions at the nursery enjoy healthy snacks and a number know which foods are healthier. The centre promotes healthy eating, and the gardens at both sites, together with the 'food club', are used effectively to promote healthy foods. The centre works very effectively with health workers to ensure mothers with postnatal depression are provided with one-to-one support. The physical play sessions encourage children to be very active and new parents learn how to develop the children's physical skills further. The particularly effective support for the breast-feeding group is helping to ensure a greater proportion of mothers breast-feed than is seen nationally.

The vulnerable families in the area benefit from exceptionally well-integrated health services with play and guidance at the centre. These well-developed services enable very good support for those children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. For example, the provision of speech therapy for young children and support for young parents to effectively reduce rate of teenage pregnancies.

Parents, carers and children all feel very safe in the centre and their awareness of safety issues is promoted by the extremely effective role models of the staff. Children's understanding of keeping safe is enhanced through regular health and safety checks. Children participate in a wide range of physical activities both indoors and outdoors and they use equipment very safely and sensibly. Parents and carers are referred to the home safety scheme and provided with additional advice to ensure children are safe and secure at home. The introduction and implementation of the Common Assessment Framework is used effectively because parents and carers have great confidence in the staff and because of the close cooperation between the centre, community and health professionals. Users' concerns regarding housing, employment and domestic violence are met effectively through opportunities to meet with advisers or through home visits.

Children who attend activities at the centre thoroughly enjoy play and learning, and this enables them to make excellent progress in all areas of learning, particularly their language and social skills. They are consequently well prepared for school. Parents and carers acquire a good range of skills and this has a positive impact upon their confidence and encouraging them to become skilled volunteers. A good number move on to paid employment. However, the centre is not able as yet to identify how long users remain in work long term. Relationships are excellent and this enables users to approach staff with confidence when seeking information or advice. The parent forum and representation on the advisory board provides users with excellent

opportunities for them to express their views and to influence the direction of the centre. The centre has a wide range of strategies for ascertaining views from all groups of users within the reach area about future improvements. The determination of staff is ensuring it is becoming increasingly effective in engaging those who are traditionally harder to reach.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

1

The centre is extremely effective in assessing the needs of its users and this enables it to effectively use its resources to best effect. Excellent use is made of assessment procedures to evaluate the impact of its current services. It liaises extremely well with other providers and signposts users to other facilities that are more appropriate to their needs. For example, links with an extended services coordinator enable those who wish to improve their computer skills to take courses at a local primary school. Similarly, those users who wish to improve their English skills beyond the level taught at the centre are signposted to other, more suitable facilities.

The quality of planned activities is excellent. The strong inter-agency links enable health service workers such as midwives and community nurses to identify and support families' needs. A considerable number of children benefit from the availability of a speech therapist. Although at the present there are no accredited courses held at the centre, users are presented with certificates acknowledging attendance and achievements. Photographs of certificate holders around the centre depict what it does for their self-esteem. Adult input into sessions is excellent. A good number, who were users, have now become volunteers.

Activities are tailored to the needs of individual children and adults, including fathers and vulnerable groups such as refugees and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The centre targets the most vulnerable, taking its resources, such as the 'Play Bus', into the community. The promotion of activities through outreach

work is well developed and there has been a good impact on issues concerning guidance on smoking, drugs and sexual health. Parents and carers are very positive about the range of activities during school holidays, and the visit by the 'man and his snakes' is remembered by many.

These are the grades for the quality of provision.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Leadership and management and governance of the children's centre are outstanding. The headteacher and children's centre coordinator have a determination to bring together the best resources to support the needs of the community. Through their efforts and determination, the centre continues to improve. The advisory board and governors have a very clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and fulfil them very well. Partnerships with both voluntary and paid organisations are well established and this helps the centre to run smoothly. The centre is particularly good at identifying new community groups, such as those from eastern Europe and China. Consequently, it is well placed to introduce and sustain support for these groups. Policies and procedures are clearly understood by centre staff and staff from outside agencies. The local authority provides a good range of data that supports the centre's strategic development and the children's centre coordinator is now well placed to use the longer-term data available to identify the long-term impact of its initiatives.

The centre provides extremely good value for money. It makes excellent use of the accommodation that is clean and safe. It also makes effective use of a number of other sites, particularly during holiday periods, which are more suited to smaller groups, and of volunteers to support its activities. Staff deployment is effective for the programme of activities and it ensures that waiting lists are as small as possible. Parents and carers really appreciate the good partnerships that have been established with health and other professionals to support their needs.

The regular training for safeguarding and child protection ensures that staff are well versed in all aspects of safeguarding. Clear procedures are implemented by staff and other agencies that work in the centre regarding reporting any concerns relating to children's welfare or safety. Staff know the designated person and there are clear policies and procedures in place to be followed. Case notes confirm that prompt

action is taken when any concerns are raised concerning potential abuse and when parents and carers raise issues regarding their child’s development or health, helping to ensure they are very well looked after. The centre is very successful at providing help for users subject to domestic violence through its links with voluntary organisations.

The centre energetically promotes the inclusion of all families in its work. Meetings are held with members of the local community and the centre actively celebrates different cultural and religious events. Users from the hard-to-reach families and potentially vulnerable groups are provided with effective support to enable and encourage them to take part in activities, and this is showing increasingly positive impact. The centre has good success at engaging fathers for the Saturday morning group, but also for the ‘Play and Stay’ sessions.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre’s policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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	2

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Low Hall Nursery School and Children's Centre on 23 and 24 March 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Thank you very much to all of you who took the time to come and speak to us about the centre. Thank you also to those of you who allowed us into your activities. It was helpful to get your views and thoughts. The discussions showed us how much you appreciate the centre and the wide range of activities that it offers, and how well the centre takes account of your views. Many of you commented upon how you enjoyed the journey to Stratford, making kites with your children and most interestingly, meeting the snakes!

The centre is an exceptionally safe place to bring your children. The rooms are very clean and there are many interesting and enjoyable activities for the children to take part in, both indoors and outdoors. We were very pleased to see how the children enjoyed the physical play sessions but also how you enjoyed watching them gain in confidence. As a result of the support provided, children make outstanding progress in all areas of learning. Those in charge of the centre lead it very well. We were very impressed with the support offered by staff to help you keep healthy and safe.

The centre provides excellent opportunities for you to meet with others and to meet with professionals who can provide you with advice and support for a wide range of issues. Many of you commented on how your lives had improved through being able to meet people and how your confidence had improved. Some of you said how the centre had helped you to get back to work. There are excellent opportunities for those of you at an early stage of learning English as an additional language to improve your skills. We were pleased to see how confident you were becoming in describing fashion items. The centre is gradually being provided with more information about needs of the area and how it is having a positive impact on the lives of families and their children. We have asked the centre to make even greater use of this information to identify the longer term impact of some of the activities so they can identify ways to support you further.

Thank you once again for taking the time to talk to us.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.