

Inspection report for Ackroyd Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Lewisham
Inspection number	367546
Inspection dates	30–31 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Denise Blackwell HMI

Centre governance	Ackroyd Children and Families
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Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Ackroyd Children and Family Unit (974144) Ackroyd Children and Family Baby Unit (EY291378)

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.

Published: April 2011



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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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, the senior leadership team, parents, health representatives, local authority representatives, front line staff, members of the Board of Trustees and a range of children's centre partners. 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

Information about the centre

Ackroyd Children and Families, who provide the governance for Ackroyd Children's Centre, is located in the Crofton Park ward of the London Borough of Lewisham. Ackroyd is a phase two children's centre serving an area that is one of the 70% most disadvantaged areas of the country. It is located in an area where up to 75% of properties are privately owned. The centre was designated in 2008 and achieved full children's centre status in November 2009. The percentage of families in receipt of out of work benefits is around national averages. Demographics in the area are changing as a large proportion of families work in the public sector and are at risk of losing their jobs, with a number of families already reducing the hours worked.

Lewisham is divided into four areas for oversight of their children's centres. Ackroyd Children's Centre is located in Area 2. Families can access any children's centre in Lewisham but for performance management reasons each area works as a cluster of centres to prevent duplication of services between them. Some children's centre

services are delivered under a central contract to the London Borough of Lewisham such as outreach and family support. Ackroyd is one of seven children’s centres in Area 2. However, two of these are currently closed due to renovation work on the sites where they are located. One of the closed centres is within quarter of a mile of Ackroyd Children’s Centre.

Ackroyd Children’s Centre delivers the majority of its activities in the rooms of Ackroyd Community Centre where the Ackroyd Children and Family Unit, caring for children aged two to four years of age, is also located. The baby unit is located a few doors away in a converted house that is also the location of the offices of Ackroyd Children and Families. Ackroyd Children and Families is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee and has operated in the community for over 30 years.

Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and understanding which are in line with levels expected for their age. Families come from a variety of backgrounds including White British and Black African heritage with an increasing population of Polish families in the area. Ackroyd is governed by Ackroyd Children and Families, who have a service level agreement with the London Borough of Lewisham to deliver the children’s centre services required of centres located in 70% disadvantaged areas. The Board of Trustees for Ackroyd Children and Families is made up of 95% parents who use an Ackroyd Children and Families service and 5% community members. The board has five sub-groups that focus on human resources; health, safety and security; research and strategic development; external relations; and finance.

Overall effectiveness

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Ackroyd Children’s Centre is a good setting that is widely appreciated within its community. The manager and her strong leadership team, along with support from the Board of Trustees, are improving partnerships with other services within the children’s centre remit. This is increasing the use of a wider range of expertise and resources to reach out to more users, providing the effective services and support which they need. The manager’s excellent communication with staff, the local authority’s quality assurance and performance monitoring, plus strong mechanisms for ascertaining the views of users, inform the centre’s in-depth understanding of the their strengths and weaknesses. The centre’s skilled and committed teamwork, underpinned by extremely well-founded strategies to identify strengths and areas to develop, demonstrates an excellent capacity for sustained improvement.

Outcomes are improving across the whole of Area 2 including Crofton ward, though some of the activities provided to support and improve outcomes still need time to embed to enable the centre to show the full impact of what is in place. Outcomes for children are outstanding in nearly all respects, though the impact on the outcome for the whole family is not yet fully established in some areas. Children are making outstanding progress from their starting points and this is clearly seen in improving Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores and long-term tracking of children who have accessed early years provision in the centre. 'Stay and Play' sessions are extremely well attended with up to 70 families per session. Sessions run for four hours with parents dropping in when it suits them best. Parents are informed about visitors to sessions such as the speech and language therapist so that they can time their attendance to coincide with visitors. Although singing time takes place at some sessions, and parents can also request this, both parents and the speech and language therapist would like to see more pre-planned specific singing and rhyme times. Staff model play with the children. However, timings for different activities are not included in the information about 'Stay and Play' and, as a result parents miss opportunities to develop their skills and understanding of how they can support their children's learning and development at home.

Children and their parents demonstrate exceptionally positive behaviour and relationships. Users are fully involved in decision making and taking forward the work of the children's centre through involvement as both volunteers and trustees of the board. The centre has played a significant role in the community for over 30 years and since taking on children's centre status has established itself at the heart of the community. Both the centre and the local authority are aware of the need to consider the impact of the closing of another children's centre in Area 2 when reviewing the service level agreement as the families living near to the closed centre have differing needs to the community that is currently the main focus of this centre. The users of the closed centre, who may be more vulnerable and/or harder to reach, are now likely to access activities at Ackroyd more frequently. The centre is rightly proud of the achievements of staff, children and parents but these are not routinely celebrated to clearly show the high expectations the centre has for its users.

Centre staff are highly adaptable and offer flexible provision for families to meet their specific needs. This is based on excellent assessment of individual needs through the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) resulting in individually tailored services and support. The centre's excellent local knowledge of parents in the area, including those from minority ethnic groups, ensures these families are identified and encouraged to access centre activities.

The good leadership and management are supported by clear and very well established governance arrangements. The Ackroyd Children and Families Board of Trustees has been in place for over 30 years and very effectively links strategic plans, management plans and provision. This ensures all understand the governance and accountability arrangements and, as a result, morale is very high, and all levels of staff and the community believe in the centre's success. The centre works very well with all the partners commissioned by the London Borough of Lewisham to

deliver area- and borough-wide services. The centre underwent a change to its operational structure about 18 months ago leading to the current structure of the service. This and the sub-groups of the Board of Trustees now ensure services are integrated and provision is cohesive. Although relationships are understood and effectively managed, the centre is still in its early days and partnerships are still improving. The centre is fully aware of the need to further develop partnerships to ensure they continue to meet the needs of an increasing group of users and so that all partners are aware of the scope and limitations of the centre.

Inclusion of all children and families is extremely effective. Access issues for children and parents with disabilities were clearly shown in the centre's thorough audit of access. The audit was used very effectively not only to identify access problems but also to identify creative resolutions about how they can support families with disabilities to access services in the centre. Safeguarding is given the highest priority in the centre. All staff are well informed and have a comprehensive understanding of safeguarding issues. This is supported by authoritative, centre-specific safeguarding policies and a clear line of reporting for safeguarding issues.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Review the content of "Stay and Play" sessions so they can be used to an even greater extent to:
 - develop the skills of parents so that they are better able to support their children's development and learning at home
 - establish a singing and rhyme time so that parents know when it will take place and can access at this time.

- Celebrate users and staff's achievements routinely to raise aspirations and encourage staff and children to build on their achievements.

- Further develop partnership working to enable the centre to take a full and active role in developing and implementing a variety of partnership activities.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The health of users in Area 2 is improving in many ways and the centre is making a good contribution to supporting this. Users talk enthusiastically and confidently about the support they have had to improve children's diets. This is further supported by the healthy breaks and meals for children in the childcare provision and attendees of the 'Stay and Play' sessions. Data for Area 2 show that breast-feeding, immunisation and smoking cessation rates are improving, while teenage conception rates and obesity are declining. Although Ackroyd Children's Centre does not hold on-site post-natal checks or baby weighing, this has not been a priority for them as the health

centre located just around the corner is extremely well used by parents in the community.

However, health visitors attend some of the 'Stay and Play' sessions and parents are always informed when health workers, such as the speech and language therapist, will be present through posters and newsletters. A part of the agreement with the local authority is for the centre to signpost parents to services they need where the centre does not provide these directly. Professionals say that they are very good at this, ensuring parents who need additional support receive it. As a result, almost all parents show they are developing a good understanding of how to keep their children healthy.

Children's behaviour in the registered provision and the 'Stay and Play' sessions is exceptional. They have care and consideration for each other and understand how to keep themselves safe. Parents are supported to keep their children safe at home through the home safety check and provision of home safety equipment. Evidence provided through case studies and personal testimony shows that parents that are experiencing times of challenge or difficulties in their lives are extremely well supported. Although support for users who are in times of crisis is provided through a mix of centre and borough-wide services, parents see a seamless service. This is because of the excellent processes in place for assessing multiple needs using the Common Assessment Framework. This, in turn, is showing sustained and significant improvement for children in need and children with child protection plans. Data gathered by the local authority show that both accidents and rates of domestic violence in Area 2 are reducing.

Children are making excellent progress in their educational development from their starting points. Parents are also involved in developing skills through adult training programmes with some parents gaining qualifications such as childcare qualifications. The centre does not provide or commission these services directly but signposts parents to courses that may be of benefit to them. Users say how much they enjoy their training and parenting sessions. All users in the centre get on very well together and with staff, and treat each other with respect. The increasing numbers of centre users and the requests from users for more activities shows the extent to which the centre has established itself at the heart of the community.

Children are making outstanding progress in developing skills for the future. The recent move of the Job Club from the closed children's centre to a nearby venue is helping local parents to improve their economic stability and independence. The need for support for benefits and getting back into work was identified by the centre because of their excellent knowledge of the changing demographics of the area and the number of residents likely to be affected by public sector job cuts. However, this service has only recently been established with Ackroyd Children's Centre involvement and is not yet able to demonstrate the full impact on outcomes. Feedback from parents who have accessed the service is good, though they would prefer the Job Club to run in the community centre during 'Stay and Play' sessions.

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	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, 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	2
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 commissioned to provide childcare places; "Stay and Play" sessions three times per week; a toy library; signposting to outreach and family support and health services; and to work in partnership with statutory agencies. The partnerships that have been established with local agencies and partners commissioned to deliver specific centre services result in well coordinated and effectively tailored provision. However, the centre is restricted as to what it is able to deliver and is currently not able to increase the activities on offer due to the needs of other users of the very well-used community centre. This is where the childcare provision for two-to-four-year-olds and 'Stay and Play' sessions are provided. The centre is constantly looking for new larger premises and/or local venues to enable it to increase and improve the services and activities already on offer. That said, best use is made of the resources available to enable the centre to continue to meet users' needs in challenging times. As a result, the centre is seeing increasing numbers of users of their services.

Parents can give clear examples of where support from the centre has had a real impact on them and their children. Consequently, users gain great trust in centre staff that enables them to gain confidence and engage successfully in the services offered. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is used very well for children with multiple needs or where services other than those provided by Ackroyd Children's Centre are needed. When children move on to school, a new CAF form is completed to pass on to the school so that they are fully aware of the child's needs from the start and can also see the progress made since the first CAF was completed. The use of the CAF ensures that parents are fully involved in the assessment of their children's needs.

Provision to help children learn and develop is good. "Stay and Play" activities and the toy library are helping the centre to promote purposeful learning. There are many users of centre services, staff and volunteers who work for Ackroyd Children and Families who have achieved their goals. However, these are not routinely

celebrated. The well-targeted and coordinated guidance and support provided by the centre enables parents to improve outcomes for their children. This, along with the tailored support for users, is improving and supporting parents to also improve their individual and family outcomes.

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	2
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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Safeguarding practice for making referrals, sharing relevant information and helping families in time of crisis are exemplary. All staff have attended safeguarding training and know what to do if they have any concerns. This ensures that all staff are aware of child protection issues and are well supported by the systems in place. Risk assessments are detailed and updated regularly. All required checks have been carried out and the centre is rigorous in its monitoring of adults who have access to children at the community centre. This ensures users are safe and feel confident that their children are being well cared for. Health professionals see the centre activities as a place where they can safely hold meetings with vulnerable parents. Signage in the childcare provision ensures all users are aware of who to go to if they have any safeguarding concerns. Users of other activities are given an introductory pack that includes information about safeguarding arrangements and who to talk to if they have any concerns.

A particular strength of the centre is the parent involvement through the board, parents' evenings and informal contact at activities. This successful feature of the centre makes a beneficial contribution to the lives of its users, not least in boosting parents' self-worth and confidence. The recent introduction of sub-groups for specific areas of work undertaken by the Board of Trustees ensures known partners and parents take an active role in responding to local needs and understand the role of children's centres in Area 2 and in the London Borough of Lewisham.

The board and senior leadership team are highly successful in inspiring the centre towards meeting its ambitious targets. The centre manager has brought a new insight into the analysis of data leading to searching analysis and self-challenge. The good partnership between the centre and the local authority ensures that planning is well targeted and monitoring of outcomes against the requirements of the service level agreement is rigorous. The centre manager provides regular reports to both the

board and local authority to clearly show the progress made and what more still needs to be done. This, in turn, feeds into the business plan for Ackroyd Children and Families that identifies any shifting priorities or changing needs. Signposting to other services is effective because staff know who their existing partners are. However, they are still seeking out and learning about all the partnerships they can access to support families who use children's centre services. This is a point of discussion between the centre manager and the local authority who clarify when a service is available centrally or in Area 2 where Ackroyd Children's Centre identifies a new or changed need in the area.

The centre makes good use of the limited resources, in the way of space, available to it. Activities are becoming increasingly popular and users say the activities offered are generally well aligned to their needs, although they nearly all say they would like more of them and more often. Staff deployment is effective and this ensures the centre can do a lot with the few staff it has. The centre is aware of the likely impact of the closing of another nearby children's centre and discusses this with the local authority service area manager to ensure continuing good value for money.

The inclusion of all families is very effectively promoted. The centre contributes to the narrowing of the gap in achievement in the whole of Area 2. The range of users is fully reflective of the community the centre serves. The centre manager is proactive in removing barriers and has developed and delivered very good quality equality and diversity training to all centre staff. Although not yet required to do so, the centre has undertaken equality impact assessments. It has also audited its compliance with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. This resulted in clear actions for the centre and for staff. This is rigorously monitored and forms that capture information about users' backgrounds and ethnicity are ensuring that the centre is knowledgeable about those families who use its services.

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	2
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	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
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	1

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

The inspection of Ackroyd Children and Family Unit (974144)

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Ackroyd Children's Centre on the 30 and 31 March 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

The strong centre leadership, alongside the work of the dedicated staff, have provided you and your children with a range of services that are carefully tailored to meet your particular needs. Many of you told us how much you enjoy the activities, and have benefited from the services provided through the centre. Those of you who spoke to us said that your children's centre is a friendly and welcoming place. Many of you would like the centre to provide activities more often as you appreciate them so much.

Many of you who use the centre are now very much better at staying safe and healthy and providing for your families. Some of you are also improving your skills because of the encouragement of the centre staff and their knowledge of what is available to support you and meet your needs. Your children are well catered for through the activities such as 'Stay and Play'. Although you are clearly enjoying attending activities, we have asked the centre to review their 'Stay and Play' sessions to help you to better understand how to support your children's learning at home. Children settle well into the registered childcare provision and make much better progress than they would if they had not benefited from the centre's services. It was good to see so many parents becoming involved in the activities in the centre.

Many of you make an excellent contribution to the centre services and the life of the community. It was very pleasing to speak to so many confident adults who take

pride in their achievements. Some of you are very rightly proud of becoming volunteers to enable you to give something back to the centre for all the help and support it has given you. Those of you we spoke to said how much they appreciated that there is always someone to help when you need advice. Those of you who have felt isolated say you have made friends as a result of coming to the centre. As you are rightly proud of your achievements, we have asked the centre to celebrate everybody's achievements more routinely to help raise your and your children's aspirations.

The centre manager and centre staff understand your needs well, and those of your children, and they check carefully that they continue to do an excellent job. They show that they are determined to improve the lives of users even more. They have an impressive track record so far, so we have no doubt that the excellent work will continue. The centre's partnership with health visitors, plus staff's knowledge of the local community, ensures those most in need of support receive it. However, we have asked the centre to continue to build on and develop its partnership working to enhance even further opportunities for you to have a very positive impact on improving outcomes.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with us and were willing to share your thoughts and feelings about the centre. We wish all of you and your families the very best for the future.

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