

Inspection report for Abbey Wood Nursery School and Children's Centre

Local authority	Greenwich Borough Council
Inspection number	367730
Inspection dates	24–25 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Joan Lindsay

Centre governance	Abbey Wood Nursery School governing body on behalf of the local authority
Centre leader	Jennifer Ramsook
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Abbey Wood Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Abbey Wood Nursery and Children's Centre [EY286681]

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.

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. This report incorporated the inspection of the linked childcare provision inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, a representative of the local authority and members of the steering committee. They also held meetings with representatives from partner agencies including health services, social services and the childminder network coordinator. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents, including key policies, the centre's development plan, user surveys and the centre's evaluation of its services.

Inspection judgements

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

Information about the centre

The centre was designated in 2006 as a Phase One centre. It is managed by the governing body of Abbey Wood Nursery School on behalf of the local authority. The headteacher and inclusion manager/acting deputy headteacher oversee the management of both the nursery school and the centre. Other members of staff include a children's centre services manager, family involvement coordinator, activities supporter and administrative support worker. The centre accommodation consists of one large and one small meeting room, a small outdoor area and an office.

The centre is situated within an estate that is in the 10% most deprived in the country. There are 955 children under five in the reach area and 76% of those come from black and minority ethnic groups. Thirty-eight different languages are spoken by users of the centre. Approximately 30% of the under-fives are registered with the centre. The rate of childhood obesity in the reach area is 14% compared with 10% nationally. There are 203 lone parents in the area and 40% of children under five live in a workless household. Since designation there has been an increase in the number of lone parents and younger families moving in to the area, many of whom are economically disadvantaged. Fifty-eight per cent of children in the area attain the expected level at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage having entered with skills generally below those expected for their age. The percentage gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the average is 31%.

The centre works in partnership with other agencies to prioritise the services it offers to support users specifically in accident prevention, behaviour management strategies, speech and language therapy and under-five obesity. The centre is open all year round apart from two weeks in August.

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

Abbey Wood Children's Centre is providing a satisfactory service. The centre has many strengths including the care, guidance and support it provides for those who use it, especially in times of crisis. This is because it is warm and welcoming and provides a safe, secure haven where users feel able to confide in staff. The view of one user, shared by several others was that staff 'offered a shoulder to cry on and are always there for you'. The centre is fully inclusive and everyone is treated equally which is much appreciated by those who use it. A typical view voiced by one user was, 'It's my family here.' However, there are still some hard to reach groups, particularly in the most economically deprived area, who are not benefiting from the services offered, to a large extent due to the lack of a systematic outreach programme. Safeguarding procedures are good and staff are well trained and alert to any possible concerns. The sharing of staff expertise with the adjacent nursery school ensures that there is a strong focus on developing the Early Years Foundation Stage skills and the speech and language needs of young children. Consequently, children's learning and development are good. Strong, integrated partnerships mean that users are given well-targeted support especially to meet the needs of young children's health and well-being. As a result the outcomes for those who use the centre are good.

The centre has not yet extended its work to a high proportion of those in its reach area. This is partly because specific data have only recently been available and are only beginning to be used to measure its impact on the wider community. A consequence of this is that the centre's development plan does not have targets that are specific or quantifiable enough to measure its success and set challenging targets. Furthermore, those who use the centre are not involved well enough in the centre's development and strategic planning as there are no formal methods to enable them to do so. They have only limited representation on the steering committee and there is no parents'/users' forum at present. In addition, the steering committee while supportive, and representative of the partners working with the centre, is not proactive enough in evaluating the services offered and in challenging the centre. The centre's self-evaluation is generally accurate and there is a strong team ethos and enthusiasm to improve and extend the benefits to more users in the reach area. This, coupled with the centre's clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, means that there is a satisfactory capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the percentage of those in the reach area who use the centre by:
 - making better use of the data that is now available to target hard to reach groups
 - developing a more systematic outreach programme delivered by centre staff.

- Improve the centre's development plan so that targets are more specific and measurable by:

- capturing more detailed information about the users so that impact can be measured in more aspects
 - increase the involvement of the steering committee in the setting of challenging targets.
- Involve users/parents in the strategic management and governance of the centre so that their views are fully taken into account by:
- setting up a users’/parents’ forum
 - ensuring users are more involved in the steering committee.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Healthy lifestyles are promoted well by the centre, enhanced by the effective partnerships with health visitors and the family information service. The weekly community fruit and vegetable stall promotes healthy eating well. Stay and Play sessions are planned and healthy snacks are offered, to enhance children’s and parents’ understanding of healthy eating, for example when children could make an ‘Eatwell’ plate. Oral health is promoted well, including at the Fathers’ Brunch sessions. A focus on childhood obesity has led to effective support for mothers when weaning their children. Immunisation rates have also improved as a consequence of close working with the health partners. Where the centre does not offer specific support such as for smoking cessation and support with breastfeeding, it signposts to other centres or agencies. However, it is not systematically following up these referrals enabling it to judge the impact.

All those who use the centre say they feel safe there and safeguarding procedures are a high priority. Children behave in a safe manner when using the resources. Parents have benefited from the centre’s focus on keeping children safe in the home through first-aid courses and support from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. Home visits to provide advice on safety have been effective and much appreciated by users. Parents state that the centre has been effective in improving their understanding of how to care for and interact with their child through parenting programmes and targeted support for behaviour management. The centre has been effective in protecting the welfare of children through the proactive use of Common Assessment Frameworks (CAFs) and child protection plans.

Children and adults show high levels of enjoyment in the activity sessions and participation rates are high especially for the Stay and Play sessions. As a result, the children who use the centre make good progress especially in their personal, social and emotional development. Anecdotal evidence from parents is that children’s confidence is greatly enhanced through their attendance at the centre. ‘He’s like a different child’ was one of many similar comments. Specific problems, for example speech impediments, are corrected through well-targeted support from partners such as the speech and language therapist. Tracking the progress of children who have accessed the centre is just beginning but the evidence so far is that those children make a smooth transition to nursery school which has a positive impact on their

progress there. Early Years Foundation Stage data show that overall there are improvements in those achieving at the expected levels and that the achievement gap is narrowing. There are no discernible differences among different groups of children.

Children behave well in the centre and the staff are good role models in relation to developing positive relationships. Parents say that because of support from the centre and activities such as baby massage, their relationships with their children have improved and are more enjoyable. Users' views are canvassed, and they are given the opportunity to evaluate the activities and suggest improvements. However, this is done on an ad hoc basis as there is not yet a parents'/users' forum and so there is only limited involvement by users in the governance of the centre. Nevertheless, their views are taken into account; for example, when the 'Stay and Play' sessions got too busy, it was decided, after consultation, to limit use to one session per week.

The social and independent skills that children are developing give them a good base for their future. There are specific examples of where the centre has helped users go back to work or training especially by facilitating placements on the 'Two Year Old Programme'. However, the centre recognises that it is not yet doing enough to reach some sections of the community to enhance their literacy, numeracy and language skills. In addition, where users are signposted to other agencies such as Jobcentre Plus or the Greenwich Local Labour and Business group, this contact is not routinely followed up in order to measure the impact.

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, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
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	3
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	3

How good is the provision?

3

The needs of individuals who use the centre are assessed well and used to target specific and effective support. This is particularly so for the areas the centre has prioritised, for example support with child development and speech and language.

However, the needs of different groups in the wider community are not assessed systematically, or routinely informed through consistent outreach work from centre staff. This is because the availability and use of data are only in their infancy. Consequently, although the range of services currently meets the needs of those who use the centre, there are still a large number of those in the community who do not access it. A recent survey shows that the majority of those who come to the centre did so initially through word of mouth or on the recommendation of a friend rather than through proactive outreach targeted at specific groups such as workless households or teenage parents.

The centre promotes learning and development well through the good quality activities that are delivered enthusiastically and effectively by staff who are skilled in Early Years learning. Parents state that their children’s behaviour and confidence is much enhanced through coming to the centre. For example, those whose children have been referred to the ‘Two Year Old Programme’ have seen great improvements in their social skills. Where there have been specific learning or behaviour needs, these have been addressed well as the centre has been proactive in helping with eating problems, speech difficulties and physical movement problems. Several parents stated that seeing how well their children have improved has had a positive impact on their own well-being and state of mind. Children’s achievement is celebrated well, for example those who finished a music therapy course were given certificates and a lot of praise for their contribution and progress. The centre has also been effective in assisting adults back to work or training. This is through the regular drop-in sessions from a local advice service and displaying advertisements for job vacancies available through Jobcentre Plus. Facilitating classes for those who speak English as an additional language has also improved the confidence and job opportunities for those from minority ethnic groups.

The quality of care, guidance and support for users is good because staff know them well and have their confidence. The centre is particularly good at helping those in times of crisis and has provided support with housing, schooling and personal matters where users state that they feel they can talk to staff and not be judged. Where specific assistance has been given, often where there are multiple and complex needs, this has had a profound and positive impact, with users describing the centre as a ‘lifesaver’. The centre recognises that this good work now needs to be extended into the wider community through more outreach work.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
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	3
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?

3

The day-to-day leadership and management under the nursery school headteacher and acting deputy headteacher are good although there is occasionally a 'blurring' of the two institutions. Consequently, the centre is not always seen as a separate entity. The positive side of this is that staff expertise is shared and children make a very smooth transition to the nursery. The downside is that the centre has not been proactive enough in relation to monitoring and evaluating its own progress.

The steering committee, which reports to the governing body of the nursery school, has representatives from most of the partner bodies but is largely reactive rather than proactive. This is especially so in relation to its involvement in the centre's development plan where targets are not specific or measurable. There is not enough user representation on the steering committee to enable users to be fully involved in shaping the future of the centre. The local authority is supportive and committed to the work of children's centres but the lack of usable data until recently means that more formal monitoring of the centre's progress, such as through the Annual Conversation, is just beginning. Self-evaluation is generally accurate and is supported by evidence of impact in specific areas especially in relation to outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in child health. However, users' views are not yet reflected well enough in the centre's self-evaluation. Nevertheless, there is a cohesive desire among all those connected with the centre for its work to be extended and for the good outcomes that are currently being achieved, particularly for children, to be disseminated to more in the reach area.

The centre's accommodation is limited in size and there is no space to provide crèche facilities which has limited some of the activities the centre can offer. The services provided are used well but by a limited range of users. Consequently, the centre offers satisfactory value for money.

The reach area is multi-ethnic and the centre makes everyone welcome and diversity is celebrated. The centre is accessible to disabled users and anecdotal evidence is that the centre is sensitive to the needs of families where children have disabilities putting in good levels of support. While there is evidence to show that there has been some impact in narrowing the achievement gap, there are still sections of the community who are not accessing the centre and therefore not benefiting from the services offered.

Safeguarding is given a high priority and procedures are robust to ensure all appropriate checks are carried out on those working in and with the centre. The centre is quick to identify any concerns including where there may be incidences of domestic violence or mental health issues, as staff are well trained in child protection matters. Where necessary, the staff will instigate and manage CAFs and work effectively with key agencies to safeguard children.

The impact of integrated work with partners is strong for those who use the centre. Case studies and anecdotal evidence reflect the high levels of individualised support

put in by services such as the family information service and health visitors. The very close links with the nursery school have had a particularly positive impact on the outcomes for young children. Sessions such as the 'Sharing Songs and Stories' taken by the early years librarian are indicative of the positive impact from strong partnerships on Early Years development.

There are very high levels of satisfaction from those who use the centre's services. However, outreach services delivered by the staff are currently limited and carried out on an ad hoc basis. In addition, the needs of some users have only recently been identified and so they are not yet benefiting from the services on offer. In addition, while users are invited to evaluate some of the activities, such as a recent theatre trip, this is not always done on a systematic basis for the whole range of services and activities.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
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	3

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

None

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. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Abbey Wood Children's Centre on 24 and 25 May 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

During our visit we looked at your centre's plans for development and numerous other documents, and we spoke to a wide range of partners working with the centre as well as all the staff and representatives from the local authority. We also visited several activities taking place during the inspection.

Thank you for your participation in the inspection. Those of you we spoke to were unanimous in your praise for all the centre staff have done for you and your children. This is particularly so when you have had specific problems and have turned to the centre for help. The centre is welcoming and so those who go there feel safe and confident that the staff will aim to resolve your problems in conjunction with the effective partnerships that have been established. This has been particularly so in ensuring young children develop confidence and independence so they settle quickly when they move on to nursery school. The centre has also had a positive impact in ensuring users understand how to lead healthy lives and how to keep children safe in the home. The activities that are run, such as Stay and Play and singing sessions, are much enjoyed by everyone who attends and are very popular. With a strong focus on children learning through play, guided by experienced staff, children make good progress.

Although the centre takes account of users' views, this is not yet done systematically as there is no parents'/users' forum. As a result, users are not involved enough in the governance and in the future development of the centre.

There is a caring atmosphere in the centre and safeguarding procedures are good. The centre acts swiftly and effectively when there are concerns about the welfare of users and it has had a positive role in setting up the correct systems so that other services can provide specialist support. However, the outreach work undertaken by the centre has been done on a case-by-case, rather than planned, basis and data giving precise information about the community it serves have not been available until recently. As a result, there are some in the community who are not aware of the services offered by the centre and there are not yet measures in place to monitor the impact of the centre's work. This is an area we have asked the centre to improve so that it uses data more to enable it to measure its success and plan for its future development. We have also asked the centre's steering committee to be more proactive in setting challenging and measurable targets and to try to involve more parents/users in this group.

There is a strong sense of team work among the staff and a sharing of skills and good practice with the nursery school. This is having a good impact on improving the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and for narrowing any

gaps in achievement. However, there is scope to extend the number of adults and children who use the centre and we have asked that the data now available are used more effectively to target the groups who are not yet benefiting from what the centre can offer.

With an enthusiastic staff and a commitment to succeed as well as generally accurate self-evaluation the centre is in a sound position to continue to improve.

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