

Inspection report for Maryland Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Newham
Inspection number	406956
Inspection dates	30–31 October 2012
Reporting inspector	Christine Davies HMI

Centre leader	Lisa Somerville
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school	Maryland Primary School 102730
Linked early years and childcare	Maryland Children's Centre crèche EY434711 (Registered on the Childcare Register only)

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 registered childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 60 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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager and staff, parents, representatives of the governing body, health professionals and representatives of partner agencies and the local authority. The inspectors held informal talks with children and parents throughout the inspection

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Maryland Children's Centre is located in a residential area of Stratford in East London. It was opened in 2007 as a phase two centre. It is located in the grounds of, and is managed by, Maryland Primary School. A subcommittee of the school's governing body provides governance and is accountable to the London Borough of Newham. The centre leader is one of the school's deputy headteachers. The leader is supported by a centre coordinator, administrator, outreach worker, family support worker and a qualified teacher. A crèche is provided on the site by the Pre-School Learning Alliance to support parents attending the centre. To meet its core purpose, the centre provides family learning, family support, child and family health services and advice to parents who are seeking training or employment. Services are provided at the main site, by home visiting, by outreach in the adjoining school, in community venues and in partnership at other children's centres.

The area served is among the 30% most deprived in the country. The population of the area is expanding rapidly and mobility of families in and out of the area is high. The proportion of families claiming worklessness and low income benefits is high

(40%). The proportion of lone parents, fathers and mothers, and the proportion of teenage parents in the area are also high. The proportion of the population in the area from minority ethnic backgrounds is high (74%) and very diverse. An even higher proportion (93%) of families attending the centre is from minority ethnic backgrounds, including families of Somali, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black African and White Eastern European origin. The latter (16%) makes up the largest group. Over forty languages are spoken among families attending the centre. Most children enter early years education with skills and knowledge that are below those expected for their age.

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 families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Maryland Children’s Centre gives good support to families in the area in order to meet their needs. The centre and the Maryland Primary School nursery class share an entrance gate which forms a natural link and together place the centre at the heart of learning. The centre helps a rapidly increasing numbers of families from target groups within the community that have not previously taken up services to engage in activities. The environment in the main building is immediately welcoming to families from widely differing backgrounds, with a wealth of information made available in community languages and enticing displays on a wide range of topics of interest to families, including favourite rhymes and ideas for healthy eating.

The centre’s focus on promoting equality has resulted in a threefold rise in the participation of groups identified as most in need of support, such as isolated Eastern European families, who now attend regularly. Concerted action to shape services has seen a rapid rise in fathers and young parents participating in services. Data supplied by the local authority and partners are used in detail to ensure that activities and services meet the needs of the large majority of families. Evaluations, in which parents’ views are incorporated, are effective in helping the centre to improve outcomes. Information from partner organisations ensures that the centre gets to know every new family and greets the family of each new baby with a ‘welcome’ card. Health professionals, schools and early intervention services help to identify families who are in greatest need of support. However, in a very few cases

assessment is not always full and prompt. For a very small number of families, the family is receiving services without all details of individuals, particularly of their ethnicity, being recorded or passed on to the centre. Registration in a very few cases is not prompt enough.

With regular health visitor clinics held on site, the centre helps to secure good take up of family health services so that the health of families, for example their oral health, is improving strongly. Links to services for children with disabilities through health visitors and with Maryland Primary School are good. Emotional well-being develops well for families as they get expert advice and guidance for the daily challenges they face and when in personal crisis. Staff and partners give the highest priority to keeping all families in the area safe from harm through the good safeguarding systems that are in place. Children and adults known to the centre are well protected, for example when families are suffering from domestic violence. The centre plays its part in contributing to joint work to protect children through Every Child Matters groups, the Newham's Triage system and child protection protocols.

Under the guidance of skilled practitioners, babies and children are keen to explore and learn from the earliest months. Children make good progress from their starting points and the majority of children reach a good level of development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The gap between the lowest achieving 20% of children and their peers is closing rapidly and now, at 29.4%, is below the local average. The centre is trialling detailed tracking of achievements for some children and this is having a demonstrably positive impact on the help given and subsequent progress made by these children. A record of achievement is made in a 'special book' for each child using the centre, although this method of detailed recording is not yet adapted for parents' development and their achievements are not tracked in the same detail. Parents build up confidence in their skills rapidly through family learning stay and play activities, where exemplary teaching often takes place. Because of the campus-like arrangements with the nursery class of the linked school, transition from the centre to the school could not be smoother. Children are well prepared to move on to other schools from their good experience of playing and learning in the centre's groups.

Parents' personal and educational development is good. The adults in half of families attending the centre take up training or learning opportunities in basic skills or a range of recreational classes. They are supported with a good quality crèche. A large majority progress to courses at level 2 and 3 and further qualification courses in English, which is the greatest need of most of the families. Parents are individually supported through workshops and interviews to take steps towards further training and into work when they are ready. Support for childminders is very good so that the quality of childcare in the area is sustained.

The role of the sub-committee of the governing body of the centre is well established and continuous parental representation is ensured by the centre's leaders taking steps to fill posts. Parents have many opportunities to give their views and are active in joining the parents' forum, making written suggestions and talking to staff.

Parents are motivated to become more involved in governance, although their awareness of how to go about it is low. Professional networks attended by staff and managers enable the centre to gain clear insight into changing local needs. Priorities are linked to the strategic goals of the local authority and adapted to meet needs identified locally. Because the centre has taken concerted action to fill gaps in provision and match priorities, outcomes are improving. With strong partnerships in place the centre has good capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority and partners, particularly the linked Maryland Primary School, to provide support and training to enable families to increase the level of their participation in the centre's governance.
- Work with the local authority and partners, particularly the linked Maryland Primary School, to increase the precision in the centre's development plans and the programme in more closely matching the needs of families; and use the information in assessing the centre's effectiveness by:
 - ensuring that all families benefiting from any of the centre's activities are promptly, fully and accurately registered
 - expanding the tracking systems in place for children's achievements, and put a workable system in place for tracking the achievements of adults.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Health awareness and take up of baby health checks are good in the area. Parents asked for more groups for new mums and the centre has put them on to support mothers' learning. A large majority of mothers (76%) in the Maryland area carry on breastfeeding until their baby is at least six weeks old, which is better than the national picture. The centre always takes into account the influence of different food cultures when promoting healthy food and snacks and families are learning about healthy lifestyles. The centre incorporates physical activity into all sessions. However, obesity rates in Reception classes in Newham are stubbornly worse than the national average (12.9 % compared with 9.4% nationally), as are rates for children who are underweight. Health practitioners and children's centres have taken action to improve immunisation rates. Work to promote oral health awareness has been successful. Parents have good access to child development services through the centre and speech and language therapists visit children for a coherent joined up service.

Parents cooperate with the centre to keep the building safe and secure. Those completing Triple P parenting classes persist with the positive behaviour management strategies. The local arrangements that act in place of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), the local Every Child Matters group, ensure that work

is well targeted to protect children and their parents, particularly if there are additional needs such as disability of a family member or adult mental illness. Through partnership with the police and children’s early intervention services, the centre takes action to protect families from domestic violence and other crises. The children’s centre plays an essential part in monitoring effective child protection plans.

In the centre, a qualified teacher observes children’s development and works with parents to support children’s learning. Children, whose development is tracked closely, receive additional support which assists their good progress. The percentage of children in the area reaching an overall good level of development is lower than the national average but improving rapidly, rising by from 52% to 64% from 2010 to 2012 (with the proportion in the linked school higher still at 69% in 2012). Children who have attended the centre continue to make good progress and their achievement, for example by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage in the linked school, is often higher than that of children who did not attend the centre. Families who speak English as an additional language enjoy socialising at the centre; they practise their skills in baby play and messy play sessions so that their communication skills improve rapidly.

The patience and respect shown by staff enable parents to learn at their own pace and the majority develop their personal skills well. Parents give their views on the activities and the programme of the centre. The parents’ forum is well attended and parents see it as their chance to voice their views. Some would like to make more of a contribution to governance, although they have little awareness of how they can do this. Some parents show leadership, for example in setting up a short fitness course in a ‘Fitness Club’ for other parents. Good, personalised advice enables the majority of families attending the centre to make appropriate decisions about routes to training and employment. Parents wanting to go on to work in childcare gain valuable experience as volunteers. Most parents who start out progress to level 3 in ‘Early years and childcare’. Completion and success rates are good for parents taking up basic skills and English as a second language courses. Many more learn informally through coffee mornings and teatime sessions that incorporate crafts and basic skills activities.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target 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	2
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2

The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2
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How good is the provision?	2
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Through building sound relationships with regular participants the centre knows the families and what the main issues are affecting the local community. Working with the Every Child Matters groups and with enhanced contracts for midwifery and nutritionist allow the centre to exchange information and add to understanding of families' needs; these are kept under review. Information is shared sensitively for individuals with additional needs so that the centre has a full understanding. Although the centre does not always complete registration forms fully for a small minority of families, staff observe families skilfully and are able to gain trust to elicit needs. Individuals' needs and progress are not always recorded separately, although the information is used in evaluation of services.

Partnership, particularly with the linked school, enhances the centre's planning for children's learning and development. Themes are shared with childminders and with parents to promote purposeful learning well. Teaching is good overall, with some sparkling elements of excellent practice that engage children and parents alike. In lively sessions the teachers play on the floor with children, sing and show how to play with toys. One parent pointed out, 'The teachers look like they are having fun with our children and they always play with them.' Teachers choose resources with great care and parents rightly identify that practitioners have great skill in explaining in accessible language, or a mixture of languages, how the activities promote the children's learning. The learning environment is good in formal parenting classes and recreational sessions so that children progress well. Everyday achievements, like baby sitting up for the first time, and major achievements, like passing an English test, are celebrated routinely and this spurs families on.

The quality of care provided for children in the crèche is good. Parents comment positively on the range of expertise that is available to them in the centre. The recently opened toy library has high usage as parents discuss what toys are appropriate to promote their children's learning and staff are linking this to a seasonal workshop, 'What shall I give my child for Christmas?' Parents appreciate the leaflet materials. Good use is made of information technology by parents who are at an early stage of speaking English. The centre provides two electronic computer pads that can translate and 'speak' in over a hundred languages and this supports their learning. Families feel confident to approach staff. The centre signposts parents to partner organisations for money and legal advice, although expertise is near at hand for health and development, work and training and the care of children.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Governance arrangements are clearly understood by partners because they fit into a wider Newham model and are well established. The governing body of the linked school nurtures and promotes the centre as an essential part of the school's inclusion strategy. The annual conversation meeting and quarterly reports between the centre and the local authority ensure effective accountability. These arrangements have supported the centre in reshaping its staffing and physical use so that services are maintained and improving. Professional supervision draws on varied expertise to motivate staff so that their enthusiasm for making improvements is high.

The links between the local authority strategies and the activities carried out by the centre are well developed. Priorities that meet the centre's core purpose are supported by specific and measurable plans drawn up with the involvement of partner organisations. Leaders and managers carry out a range of monitoring activities so that quality is maintained. Evaluations from partners and families are integrated with up-to-date data from the local authority. The views of users are effectively taken into account through representatives. From this, the centre builds an accurate view of its performance and maintains good value for money.

Partnerships add significantly to the flexibility of services that are carefully integrated; those in place to promote safeguarding are a strength. Centre managers ensure that all legal requirements are met and that sound staff vetting and training are in place to safeguard families in the community. Protocols for multi-agency working are effective.

The centre's focus on the broad priorities of inclusion and safeguarding permeate plans and drive the centre's work in narrowing the gap for the most vulnerable groups and individuals. Concerted work to remove barriers to access for those with English as an additional language, with speech and language difficulties, who are isolated or excluded, has led to increasing take up of services by these groups and prevention of escalation in services. The staffing composition and skill set have changed recently, with one more outreach worker yet to take up a post to match the needs of the community including fathers. Staff are deployed very well in line with their skills. Well-targeted planning is evident and focuses on clear and shared priorities that take into account the diversity of the culture, economic and social

deprivation and achievement of families.

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	2
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	2

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

Inspectors took account of the most recent inspection findings for Maryland Primary School. The school was last inspected in February 2010 and was judged to have good overall effectiveness with outstanding features. The Maryland Children's Centre Crèche that is provided on site was inspected at the same time as the children's centre. The full inspection reports for these settings are available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Maryland Children's Centre on 30 and 31 October 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank all the parents and children that we met during our visit. Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us about the work of the centre and for letting us join in activities with you.

Maryland Children's Centre gives you good all round support. More families are attending regularly from a very wide range of backgrounds. There is a warm, welcoming environment for all children and parents. A lot of parents agree with the parent who said, 'I feel relaxed and I feel as if I belong here because my culture is accepted.'

The centre puts on a programme that suits all ages and stages of children's development and your learning needs as well. You seem to enjoy singing and rhyme sessions as much as your children. You told us that you learn a lot from the staff about how your children are learning. We saw some great sessions with the staff playing on the floor with children and really getting into touching and feeling damp, sticky spaghetti with the babies. We think that the way the teacher and other staff explain things to you is excellent.

Children make good progress from their starting points which are much lower than is typical. They catch up well because the good activities provided by the centre. They are well prepared for school and especially for their transfer to Maryland Primary School.

We saw that some of you work with the teacher to collect helpful information to help you follow the progress of your children in 'special books'. The information helps the staff plan carefully about what to do next, so that future experiences follow on from what children already know. We have asked the centre to put a workable system in place for following parents' learning as well and to collect together the information to help with planning.

The centre visits each new family and tells them about the centre. We noticed that the centre does not always ask parents for all the information it could ask for when staff meet parents at the school gate or when parents first come along to the centre. Also, the centre does not always register families who are already using the school. We have asked the centre to make sure that it collects information to register you fully, accurately and promptly.

Your health and well-being and your family's improve when you attend the centre regularly. We are really pleased to see that so many families are making good use of the health visitor clinics. Many of you are making changes to healthy lifestyles and are taking good care of your teeth and your diet.

Many parents told us that they feel at ease because staff and other professionals give you good advice and guidance on many everyday matters, like money and looking after your children, and also in a crisis. The centre and all other organisations who are partners know what to do to keep you safe from harm or abuse and they take action to protect all adults and children.

Many parents succeed in following a course and go on to further training and employment when they are ready. Children enjoy their time and learn a lot when they are in the crèche while parents are on courses. Childminders are well supported at the centre.

We are pleased that so many of you take opportunities to tell the centre what you do and don't enjoy. This helps the staff to choose interesting activities for you and your children so that you develop your skills and understanding well. We have asked the centre, with help from the school and other organisations, to provide support and training that will help you to take part more fully in making key decisions about the running of the centre if you want to.

We think that the centre is well managed and gives good value for money. The centre has a track record of deciding what activities to put on to match what the great majority of families need and your lives are improving as you take part in centre services. With the strong partnerships in place, the centre has good capacity to go on improving.

We wish you and your children every success in the future.

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