

# Inspection report for Featherstone Children's Centre

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<b>Local authority</b>	Staffordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	383376
<b>Inspection dates</b>	29 February – 1 March 2012
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Joy Law HMI

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<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not applicable
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<b>Linked school if applicable</b>	Not applicable
<b>Linked early years and childcare, if applicable</b>	Not applicable

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, partner agencies and parents. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings.

## Information about the centre

Featherstone Children's Centre is located in the district of South Staffordshire. It is a phase two children's centre serving a relatively affluent area with pockets of high deprivation. The centre was designated on 30 October 2007 and has provided its core purpose through commissioned services since August 2009. It operates from a self-contained unit, which is attached to Whitgreave Primary School, and through Glenthorne Children's Centre, which is a linked site located at Glenthorne Primary School, four miles away. There are also a further three primary schools and one secondary school within the reach area.

The centre is governed by a district management advisory board that has been established since November 2011. The District Children's Commissioning Officer is responsible for commissioning services and the Head of Children's Centre for South Staffordshire is responsible for the leadership of the centre. The centre does not directly employ any staff as it commissions local organisations to provide all of its services. A full-time coordinator, who is employed through the adjacent school, and two part-time workers, who are employed through Glenthorne Primary School, are responsible for the day-to-day operation and delivery of services at the centre and linked site.

The population of the reach area is 18,952 of which there are 866 children aged under five years. Of these children, 17% live in households dependent on workless benefits. There are 120 lone-parent families with children aged under five years and

the number of these families out of work is approximately 75. The majority of the families using the centre are White British, with the remaining population being from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds.

The centre provides a range of services including health and family support services, play and learning experiences for children, and a crèche to enable parents to access services. There is no early years childcare provision at the centre. Families are signposted to early years childcare providers. A large majority of children, on entry to early years provision, have skills, knowledge and abilities which are in line with 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

Featherstone is a satisfactory children's centre. For those who engage with the centre, it provides an inclusive and welcoming environment, and the dedication and commitment of staff, ensure families feel supported and safe. One partner described the centre as, 'having a lovely supportive feel'. Comments from users such as, 'a fabulous supportive team', 'feel very welcome', 'is like an extended family', are typical. However, not enough families engage with the centre's services. The centre does not have sufficiently robust systems to monitor what it provides or to assess the needs of parents and children in order to ensure it is fully meeting these needs.

Effective multi-agency working, such as with the health visitor, local support team and outreach workers, is a particular strength and contributes well to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable families. Collectively, these organisations ensure that these most vulnerable families are given good care, and appropriate information and support tailored to their individual needs. However, partnerships with other agencies, such as schools, headteachers, midwives, adult learning services and early years providers are only adequate.

The new staffing structure across all children's centres within Staffordshire has resulted in change of leadership and accountability arrangements. Featherstone Children's Centre has continued to run its services seamlessly during this period of

turbulence and demonstrates satisfactory capacity to improve. The recently appointed leaders have a clear vision of how to improve the centre's work. Their passion, commitment and determination to do their best for the community they serve has been recognised by the local authority. They are well supported by the local authority and the re-established management advisory board. Leaders have implemented new systems to monitor, evaluate and improve the work of the centre. For example, they carry out spot checks to assess the quality of provision and to identify the impact on families over the long term. Leaders evaluate all activities, but the quality of these evaluations is variable. For example, the evaluation of the sessions to promote children's learning and development is weak. The centre uses the information provided by commissioned services to inform quarterly monitoring reviews and to ensure the development plans are linked to needs and have clear and measurable targets against which commissioned contractors are held to account. The range of services currently provided does not meet the needs of all families. Consequently, user engagement, particularly for the most isolated and vulnerable families living in the community, is low.

New systems to collate and record information from the commissioned services are beginning to give managers an increasingly accurate understanding of the community's needs. However, the quality and range of data provided are variable. For example, some information lacks detail and some data, such as live birth data, are unavailable to the centre. This impedes staff's ability to offer early support to parents, such as with breastfeeding. The centre is aware that families are accessing other services, such as Job Café, adult learning and benefits advice, but has no systematic process in place to track or monitor the outcomes for these families.

Families identified as requiring support undergo timely and appropriate assessments of their needs. However, the centre does not routinely assess and identify individual learning and development needs of other users. Consequently, sessions to promote opportunities for adults to gain skills to improve their economic stability are not routinely provided for all families. Although the centre has successfully engaged some parents, opportunities for parents to become volunteers are missed. Staff do not routinely encourage parents to consider engaging in voluntary work. Consequently the take-up rates are low.

The centre provides a range of activities that support children's social and emotional development, and communication skills. 'Stay and Play' sessions are well attended and appreciated by children and parents. Comments from parents such as, 'I have gained lots of practical tips and ideas for caring and playing with my child,' and 'My child has developed confidence and social skills,' confirm the difference the centre is making to some families. However, while children enjoy the activities provided at these sessions, they are not always linked effectively to children's stages of development and learning. This is because staff do not routinely assess children's starting points and, therefore, do not ensure that what they provide meets children's needs. Parents are supported in some sessions to understand the purpose of an activity in relation to their children's learning and how to extend learning at home. However, they are not sufficiently supported in developing their knowledge and

understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage in order that they can support their children well. Children's 'My Story' learning journeys, to which parents contribute, have been introduced but these lack meaning and quality. For example, not all parents are aware of how to link children's activities to their stage of learning and development.

Staff implement effective routines and set clear boundaries. These support the development of children's good behaviour. The monthly 'Stay and Play' sessions for fathers enable them to enjoy quality time playing together with their children and to take advantage of opportunities to improve their parenting skills. The proportion of fathers attending the centre is low but increasing. Users are contributing towards shaping the centre's services through the recently introduced parents' forum, parental satisfaction surveys and suggestion boxes. Systems to obtain children's views have recently been introduced. Where users make requests for services, the centre strives to meet these. Users feel listened to and respected.

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

### **Recommendations for further improvement**

- Increase the number of families engaging with the centre's services, particularly the most isolated and vulnerable families living in the community.
- Increase the level of engagement with partner agencies, such as midwives, adult learning services, headteachers and early years providers.
- Increase the robustness of tracking, monitoring and evaluation of services through obtaining accurate and up-to-date information from all sources, particularly commissioned services.
- Improve users' and community involvement within the centre and promote sustainability by increasing the number of volunteers who currently work at the centre.
- Identify parents' individual learning and development needs through routine assessments and increase the number of parents who access training and employment.
- Improve the learning and development opportunities for children in 'Stay and Play' sessions by:
  - implementing a robust system for assessing children's starting points and needs
  - making planning more effective to ensure activities enable children to learn and develop
  - increasing parents' knowledge and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage in order that they can support their children well.

## **How good are outcomes for families?**

<b>3</b>
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The health and well-being of families are satisfactory overall. Parents and children are developing a satisfactory awareness of how to lead healthy lifestyles. They enjoy physical activities as they take part in sessions such as 'Start to Play', 'Baby Gym' and 'Healthy Walks'. Children accessing sessions eat varied, well-balanced snacks and adults learn how to prepare nutritious meals on a budget through the 'Cook and Eat' sessions and support from the dietician. However, obesity in Reception-aged children is higher than the national average and the uptake of mothers breastfeeding their babies is lower than the national average, although improving. The number of families experiencing domestic violence is increasing.

The effective partnership working with the health visitor ensures that parents have access to a range of postnatal services and information, such as breastfeeding, weaning and feeding routines. Parents value these sessions. The majority of families are engaging well with universal services. Immunisation rates are high. Good multi-agency working ensures the arrangements for safeguarding and child protection are effective and are given high priority. Common Assessment Framework procedures are implemented effectively and ensure that the vulnerable families known to the centre, such as those with looked after children and children with disabilities, are supported well.

Parents are supported in making their homes safe and attend training in first aid to help them gain the necessary skills in the event of their children having an accident. The setting engages with the local fire prevention services to help raise children's and families' awareness of safety in the home and their communities. Parents say they feel safe at the centre. Parents experiencing domestic violence or isolation, or finding it hard to cope, report positively on how the centre has improved their confidence, self-esteem and social skills. Others report on how their parenting skills have improved and how they have made positive relationships.

Children are making satisfactory progress in their learning and development and the gap between the outcomes for the most vulnerable groups and others is narrowing. Children develop social skills as they learn how to play well together. Parents say they feel included and listened to and comment on the difference that the centre has made to their confidence and achievements as well as their children's progress, development and behaviour. Staff provide strong role models that support children's positive behaviour, and a culture of respect is evident throughout the centre. Parents and children contribute their views through informal discussion during sessions, completing evaluation forms, and the parents' forum. The inclusion of all children and their families is central to the centre's vision; equality is promoted, diversity celebrated and discrimination tackled.

Parents and children take part in fundraising activities, such as the 'Sunflower Challenge' and 'Family Fun Day' to provide additional play resources. Parents are signposted for advice and support to enable them to access services, such as housing benefits, adult learning and childcare provision. Some adults move on to further training, employment and volunteer work. Although numbers are low, the lack of robust tracking systems means the centre is unable to confirm exactly how

many have accessed these services.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

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

## How good is the provision?

**3**

The centre is a welcome and valued provision. Parents expressed appreciation for the support they receive and the positive changes that have resulted for their children and themselves. Case studies show how staff support them through difficult times and how their lives would be very different without the centre's help. Comments from parents confirm that they value the opportunities to play and spend time with their children and that, for some, the centre has been their life-line and they would not know what they would do without the centre.

The overall assessment of users' needs and the tracking of progress are of variable quality and practice is inconsistent. Analysis of data and information is improving, however, some services are not appropriately matched to need which means that some vulnerable groups, particularly the most isolated, are not being reached or supported effectively. Consequently, the centre is improving the life chances and personal development of some of the targeted groups of families. The centre's services are promoted in various ways, such as through the health visitor and Jobcentre, however, users commented that there are many families who are unaware of what the centre offers and how it can help them.

Some adults access a range of courses to improve their skills and employability, although the access to these is limited for the most isolated and vulnerable families. Parents talked positively about how they have improved their parenting, communication, literacy and numeracy skills, and are now more able to support their children's learning, particularly with their school homework. However, parents stated that they would like to learn more and that they want to become employed, but the opportunities are limited due to the restricted transport arrangements and location of adult training services. Some parents have successfully moved into employment and



voluntary work, although the numbers are low.

Parents are signposted for advice and support to enable them to access services, such as housing benefits, health services and childcare provision.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>

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

**3**

The local authority's reorganisation has resulted in new governance arrangements. The management advisory board members have clear lines of accountability, a sound understanding of their roles and responsibilities and are well placed to challenge and support the centre. The partnership board includes good representation from services which support the work of the centre and, consequently, the work of the centre is improving. There is currently no parental representation on the board. A parents' forum has been established, with the aim to encourage parents to become members of the board.

The centre's safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. The vetting of staff is secure, and staff are well trained. The centre's staff are aware of key safeguarding policies and are vigilant in identifying and responding to any potential dangers that users may encounter. Information is shared appropriately with the relevant agencies. Effective multi-agency working ensures that vulnerable families are well supported and, therefore, children are kept safe. Comments from users confirm how the support they receive improves their own and their children's lives.

The environment is warm, welcoming and safe. The centre is making effective use of resources in the majority of cases. For example, commissioned services are generally meeting the needs of families, and integrated working is ensuring services are not duplicated. However, the centre does not maximise use of the building or available resources, including the linked schools. Leaders are aware that to improve sustainability and economic independence for both the centre and families, more effort is required by all staff and partner agencies to encourage, support and recruit volunteers to run groups within the centre and community. The inclusion of all children and their families is central to the centre's vision, equality is promoted and diversity is celebrated. However, the range of services currently provided has a satisfactory impact on outcomes for users. Consequently, the service provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

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

None

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## Summary for centre users

We inspected the Featherstone Children's Centre on 29 February and 1 March 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents and concluded that the centre provides a satisfactory range of services that are mostly tailored to meet your particular needs.

The centre is an inclusive and welcoming place which is run by dedicated adults who want to serve you well. You speak highly of the centre as being a place where you feel safe, secure, supported, included and listened to. You comment on the difference that the centre has made to your confidence and achievements as well as your children's progress, development and behaviour. Comments such as, 'a fabulous supportive team', 'we feel very welcome', 'the centre is like an extended family', are typical of the views you communicated to us.

You and your children are developing a satisfactory awareness of how to lead healthy lifestyles. Children enjoy physical activities as they take part in sessions such as 'Start to Play' and 'Baby Gym'. You learn how to prepare nutritious meals on a budget through the 'Cook and Eat' sessions and support from the dietician. You are supported in making your homes safe through outreach support, safety kits and visits from local fire prevention services. Those of you who are feeling isolated or finding it hard to cope report positively on how the centre has improved your confidence, self-esteem and social skills. Others of you report on how your parenting skills have improved and how you have made positive relationships.

Some aspects of the centre's work are stronger than others. For example, effective multi-agency working, such as with the health visitor, local support team and outreach workers, is a particular strength and contributes well to improving outcomes and supporting those of you whose circumstances make you vulnerable. However, partnerships with other agencies, such as schools, headteachers, midwives, adult learning services, and early years providers are not as strong as they could be. Therefore, we have asked the centre leaders to increase the level of engagement with these partner agencies.

The recently appointed leaders have a clear vision of how to improve the centre's work. They have implemented new systems to monitor, evaluate and improve the work of the centre. They evaluate all activities, but the quality of these evaluations is variable. For example, the evaluations of the sessions to promote children's learning and development are weak. We have found that the range of services currently provided does not meet the needs of all families living in the community. As a result, many families, particularly the most isolated and vulnerable, are not accessing the centre's services. Therefore, we have asked the centre leaders to increase the numbers of these families engaging with the centre's services.

The leaders have also introduced new systems to collate and record information from the commissioned services, and these are beginning to give managers an increasingly accurate understanding of its community's needs. The centre is aware that families are accessing other services, such as Job Café, adult learning and benefits advice, but there is no reliable system in place to track or monitor the outcomes for these families. Therefore, we have asked the centre leaders to track, monitor and evaluate the services through obtaining accurate and up-to-date information from all sources, particularly commissioned services.

We know that the centre is good at responding to those of you who have been identified as in need of help and that staff undertake timely and appropriate assessments. However, the centre does not routinely assess and identify individual learning and development needs of other adult users. Therefore, we have asked the centre leaders to improve the way in which they find out what you need, and use this information where appropriate, to target resources more effectively.

The centre has successfully supported a small number of volunteers, during which time you have achieved qualifications and employment. Those of you who engage in voluntary work told us how much you enjoyed it and the difference it has made to your lives. However, staff do not routinely encourage others of you to consider engaging in voluntary work and, therefore, too few of you are given the opportunity to develop new skills. We have, therefore, asked leaders to increase the involvement of community volunteers in the work of the centre to develop a feeling of ownership and engagement.

The centre provides a range of activities that support the development of your children's social, emotional and communication skills. 'Stay and Play' sessions are well attended and appreciated by you and your children. Comments such as, 'My child has developed confidence and social skills,' confirm the difference the centre is making to some of your families. However, staff do not routinely assess what children know and can do and, therefore, do not ensure that what they provide meets your children's needs. You are supported in some sessions to understand the purpose of an activity. However, you are not sufficiently supported in developing knowledge and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage in order that you can support your children well. Children's 'My Story' learning journeys, to which parents contribute, have been introduced but these lack meaning and quality. For example, not all of you are aware of how to link children's activities to their stage of learning and development. We have, therefore, asked the centre leaders to improve the learning and development opportunities for children in 'Stay and Play' sessions by assessing what children know and need to learn next, making planning more effective, and increasing your knowledge and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre, and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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