

Inspection report for Four Dwellings Children's Centre

Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	383443
Inspection dates	17–18 January 2012
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Centre leader	Janet Rogers
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Four Dwellings Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	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.

An inspection of the co-located primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

The inspectors held meetings with the centre leader and the senior leadership team, members of staff and professionals from other partner agencies. Discussions were held with members of the advisory board, parents, carers and representatives from the local authority. The inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Four Dwellings Children's Centre is situated to the west of Birmingham in Quinton in the Edgbaston ward. It is a phase two children's centre, which was designated in March 2008 and serves a community living in one of the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. The children's centre operates on a school site shared with Four Dwellings Primary School. The centre meets its core purpose and provides a range of integrated services including family support and outreach services. The day care, which is inspected separately, provides morning and afternoon sessions for 30 children aged nought to four. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities are below those expected for their age on entry to the centre's provision.

The local authority has delegated responsibility for the day-to-day running of the centre to the governing body of the school. The centre has an advisory board which meets on a regular basis to discuss and evaluate the effectiveness of provision and report to the governing body. The centre leader retired in summer 2011, since which time, due to financial constraints, the headteacher of the school has taken on responsibility for managing the centre while day-to-day running of the children's

centre is undertaken by the children’s centre organiser and senior family support worker.

Housing in the area is a mix of private and social houses with a minority of families accommodated in low-rise maisonettes. Most of the families in the area are White British but there is a growing number of families with a range of backgrounds, including Asian and African. A small minority of children under five in the area live in workless households. There are three children subject to a child protection plan who currently have active children’s centre family support case files. There are 1170 children under five in the centre’s reach area, 677 of whom are registered with the centre.

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

3

Main findings

Four Dwellings Children’s Centre provides a good quality of service for children and families. Relationships with families are good and the centre rightly prides itself on the warm welcome it extends to all, for which it has received a parent-nominated award. Good care, guidance and support are provided as a result of effective team-working and strong partnerships. The centre’s inclusive approach ensures that families from different backgrounds feel welcome and enjoy the range of provision on offer. The centre achieved a Gold Inclusion Award in 2010 for meeting the needs of disabled children and those with special educational needs, and for the impact it has had on supporting other settings in this field. Parents and carers who use the centre are encouraged to give their views on services and let staff know what they would like. For example, parents suggest topics and themes for the ‘Stay and Play’ sessions which staff then incorporate into the programme. However, parents do not have enough opportunities to contribute to the decision making and governance of the centre.

Outcomes for users are good overall and are improving rapidly. The centre makes a good contribution to improving the health of families and children’s educational achievement. Families whose circumstances have made them vulnerable are increasingly safe and protected. Centre staff and health professionals promote

healthy lifestyles through play sessions, outreach sessions, home visits and specific support groups. Health outcomes are improving for most, although the centre's work on reducing obesity rates is not yet having an impact on children starting school. Children's speech and language development is particularly good due to the focus given to the work by the centre. Children engage actively in the good range of exciting and stimulating learning opportunities available to them and are becoming confident in their learning and development. Adults accessing learning provision have shown improvement, learnt new skills and have had a good time in the process. Those wishing to go on to further training are signposted to other providers, but the centre then has no knowledge of their achievements.

The centre is effective in keeping users safe and protected. Risk assessments of all areas ensure high levels of safety in the centre. All centre staff and key agencies have a shared understanding of how to keep children and adults safe, and children learn how to behave in ways that are safe for themselves and others. Some families' economic stability and independence have improved through gaining employment and being supported to gain the appropriate benefits, thereby reducing inequality and making a real difference to their economic stability.

Effective assessment of need and appropriate target setting ensure families, particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, benefit from a range of good-quality services that are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs. Work with lone parents and victims of domestic violence is a particular strength. The centre promotes purposeful learning well, and activities are of a good quality. The care, guidance and support provided by the centre is good. Families say they feel they are listened to and that staff are very sensitive to their needs. The centre is highly responsive at times of crisis, and the emotional needs of users are met well as staff provide one-to-one support, including counselling services.

Centre staff know the key issues facing families in the area and tailor services to meet need. They regularly monitor the impact of services they provide to the parents, carers and children who attend. The information is then collated so the impact of services on particular groups is known. Evaluation of the value for money of different activities is undertaken regularly. The small staff team maximises the services it provides by working closely with partners. All of these factors indicate that the overall leadership and management of the centre are good. Its capacity to improve further, however, is only satisfactory. There have been recent changes in management and absences in the small staff team. Attendance at the advisory board meetings is not consistent. The board receives regular reports on budgets and the work of the centre, but it is insufficiently knowledgeable about the quality of provision and lacks rigour in its challenge to help drive up the standards further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase the level of parental involvement in the decision making and governance of the centre.
- Further develop systems to track families who are signposted to other services to measure their medium- to long-term outcomes.
- Increase the role of the advisory board in evaluating provision to inform the centre's development plan, to identify priorities and to set challenging targets for improvement.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Overall outcomes for users are good. The health of families, particularly their emotional health, has improved significantly as a direct result of engagement with the centre. There is good support from health visitors, and the counselling provision available through the centre is particularly valued by users. Good integrated working has seen the numbers of children being breastfed at six to eight weeks increase slightly. The higher than average rate of impoverished language skills of children in the area is being addressed through assessment and support offered by the on-site therapist and centre staff leading to improved language skills as children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage. The healthy eating ethos throughout the centre, workshops and one-to-one support in the home by the health trainer are ensuring the take-up of more healthy lifestyles by children and families, as one parent said, 'My daughter only drinks milk and water now, I won't let her have juices.' Staff work with teenage parents on a one-to one-basis, while users with alcohol and substance abuse issues are referred to partner organisations for specific support.

Safety and the safeguarding of children and families are good. Children have a clear understanding of safety within the centre and are able to explain the boundaries and behaviour that keep them safe. Risk assessments ensure that activities and trips are safe, and most trips are accompanied by a local community police officer. Families whose circumstances make them vulnerable have their needs assessed through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and there is good support for children who are subject to child protection plans. There is particularly effective care for families and individuals in times of crisis. One parent said, 'Staff have been amazing, they listened and built a support network for me.'

Parents, carers and children enjoy opportunities to work and play together at the centre. Adults show improvement in their educational and personal development. Starting points for many children are low. Nevertheless, a large majority of the children who have used the centre achieve well and reach the expected levels at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. They demonstrate good progress in their personal, social and emotional development. Children are well prepared for their transition to school, and parents are well supported and informed about their progress.

Children who have accessed services engage in positive behaviour and show high levels of respect, care and concern for others. There are good opportunities for parents and carers to express their views through regular evaluations of activities,

and through discussion with staff. They are not, however, engaged in the decision making and governance of the centre in any meaningful way. Families using the centre to seek employment have received effective support from Jobcentre Plus. In one three-month period in 2011, 47% of job-ready customers moved into employment. Families have also achieved improved economic stability through accessing appropriate benefits and tax credits as a result of the information they have received at the centre. Those who want to access further learning are signposted to other organisations. However, uptake of these opportunities and any progression made are not then shared with the children's centre.

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	3
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	3

How good is the provision?

2

Parents, carers and children who use the centre are enthusiastic about it. One parent, for example, said, 'My children don't even say goodbye now they are so keen to be here.' Centre staff use their own expertise and skills and those of their partners to make informed and accurate assessments of the individual needs of users. Family support workers ensure that families facing complex difficulties are assessed and supported effectively through good inter-agency working and communication. Outreach work is good, and vulnerable families, including those experiencing domestic violence, are well supported. Good use of existing data means that the centre is able to target services to meet a wide range of need. The ethnic profile of those using the centre reflects that in the reach area.

Activities are of a good quality. They are designed around planned outcomes and promote purposeful learning and development. In sessions such as 'Rainbow Music' and 'Stay and Play', children are happy, relaxed, engaged and learning, while parents improve their skills in group activities by being actively engaged in the sessions. The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the centre is good, particularly in times of crisis. Family support workers are readily accessible and work effectively with partners to meet the needs of vulnerable families. The commissioning of a

counselling service ensures those in need of one-to-one specialist support are able to access it quickly and effectively. Parents recognise the support they receive, 'I personally think they have helped me in every way.' All parents who spoke to inspectors were clear about the positive impact different services have had on their families.

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

The leadership and management of the centre are good. Provision is integrated and the centre delivers services which have a positive impact on the lives of families in the area. There are strong partnerships with a range of agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, health services, Home-Start, Freshwinds, a debt and benefit counselling service, and the police. These partnerships make an identifiable contribution to meeting a wide range of needs in the local area. Governance is satisfactory. There are good arrangements for supervision, and staff are full of enthusiasm for their work and the centre. Services provided can be linked back to strategic planning. The advisory board is supportive but is not sufficiently informed to challenge the work of the centre. Planning for improvement is satisfactory, but the system used does not easily allow for parents to have a full input.

The centre makes good use of the data available from the local authority, and focuses its efforts effectively on priorities. Leaders and managers know what the key issues are facing families in the area. They know the strengths of the centre and the areas for development. The impact of provision is analysed on a regular basis. However, the impact of provision on those individuals signposted to other organisations is not routinely monitored. Staff expertise and knowledge are deployed appropriately and some staffing resources are shared with the primary school to ensure good value for money and good outcomes for all users. Users report that they are very satisfied with the services provided. As a result, the centre provides good value for money.

The inclusion of all children and their families is central to the work of the centre. Staff ensure that all children and adults, regardless of background, aptitudes or other differences, have access to the full range of experiences on offer. All information displayed promotes equality and diversity well, and a varied range of resources reflects equality and diversity of the reach area. Users' views are sought on a regular basis.

Good safeguarding arrangements ensure that children are protected effectively. The staff have a strong commitment to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. All staff have undergone training on safeguarding, and have a very clear understanding of the steps they must take if they have a concern. Checks are made with the Criminal Records Bureau to make sure that all staff are suitable to work with children, and qualifications are kept up to date through refresher training courses. Parents are well informed about the centre’s policy on protecting children and sharing information with other relevant agencies.

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	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
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	3

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

The inspectors took into account the inspection findings for linked provision which took place at the same time as the children’s centre inspection. The inspection found that children make good progress in the Nursery.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Four Dwellings Children's Centre on 17 and 18 January 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who met with us during the inspection, agreed to let us sit in on your groups, or spoke to us about the centre. We were very grateful for your help with the inspection and interested to hear your views.

Many of you went out of your way to tell us how important the centre is to you, what a difference it has made to you and how much you enjoy the activities provided. You told us that the staff are friendly, listen well and give you excellent support. We found the centre to be welcoming to all families. The staff offer good practical and emotional support to families who need it.

The extent to which the centre keeps you and your children safe is good. It is very effective in supporting you, especially at times of crisis. We know that you are asked frequently for your views on the activities and that many of you have already made suggestions about what you would like. We would like the centre to involve more of you in making decisions on how the centre is run. We have also asked the advisory board to take a more active role in producing the centre's development plan.

The majority of you who spoke to us were able to tell us what you had learned in the centre and how you are well informed about the needs of your children. You also told us that you know about healthy lifestyles and have improved your self-confidence so that you feel more able to join in activities with your children. Some of you have gone on to use services in the community that staff at the centre have told you about. We have asked the staff to keep in touch with you to find out how you are getting on.

The senior staff team do a good job in the way they run the centre. They have created a bright, clean, well-resourced environment where all are welcome.

Thank you very much for your welcome and willingness to speak to the inspectors. We thoroughly enjoyed talking with you and sampling the centre's work. We wish you every success in the future.

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