

Inspection report for Marfleet Children's Centre

Local authority	Kingston upon Hull City of
Inspection number	365809
Inspection dates	22 – 23 March 2012
Reporting inspector	Lorraine Rowson-Clark HMI

Centre leader	Duncan Lawman
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Footsteps Nursery EY441368 registered 10 January 2012

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 covers 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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers from the centre, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners, health, education and Jobcentre Plus. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Marfleet Children's Centre is a phase one centre, managed by Kingston upon Hull Council. It is situated in the east of Hull. The centre provides the full core offer of services. On-site childcare for children aged from birth to five years is provided by a private company. Health professionals provide some services and clinics in the centre.

The local authority is responsible for all aspects of the centre's work. An advisory board, which consists of professional partners, parents and community members is in place. A locality model of children's centres was introduced in Hull in April 2011, with Marfleet Children's Centre and two other children's centres working together to deliver services.

The majority of local families are of White British heritage with a low minority ethnic population of around 2.7%, the majority being Polish and Eastern European. The centre serves an area of deprivation. Unemployment rates in the area are high and some families are second or third generation unemployed. Of the 1153 children aged under five years in the reach area, 650 live in workless households dependent on benefits, which includes 430 lone parents. Of those families working, a high number is low-paid and are in receipt of the child care element of working tax credit.

Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision with skills and abilities that are below those typically found for their age, particularly in relation to their communication skills.

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

Marfleet Children's Centre has been through a period of considerable change and uncertainty. As a result of staff's dedication, it has continued to offer services to those most in need while enduring a significant reduction in its budget and rumours of closure. Despite this, the centre has continued to serve the needs of its community well. It has effectively engaged with groups whose circumstances have made them vulnerable or hard to reach and is having some considerable success in improving their lives. While outcomes are good overall, the centre is less successful in improving families' economic and social well-being as there has been limited success in increasing adults' skills for future employment due to a high drop-out rate on learning and training programmes.

The centre recognises the need to support children's learning and development, particularly in relation to their communication skills. It has had some considerable success working with one local school to improve children's readiness for school. However, this is not the case for all schools in the area where transition arrangements are weaker. Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores, although improving slowly, are below regional and national rates.

Safeguarding arrangements are effective with clear information sharing protocols, sound vetting arrangements, knowledgeable staff and robust child protection procedures. Staff are skilled in safeguarding children and families and supporting families' own knowledge and understanding of how to keep themselves safe. For example, the popular safety equipment scheme has helped reduce the number of children under the age of five having accidents in the home. Some staff are trained in the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and use this well to identify individual need and support. Consequently, children and families are highly protected and are supported well.

The centre's reach area has a number of health issues affecting it including a high teenage pregnancy rate and very low breastfeeding rates. The centre, together with health partners, has tackled these health issues with determination and tenacity and the strategies used to engage with teenage parents have resulted in a 50% reduction in the rate of second pregnancies for teenagers. Good health and nutritional advice are well-received and children in Reception Year have the lowest levels of obesity in Hull. Strategies to increase breastfeeding are having a positive impact and, although the number of mothers breastfeeding their babies beyond six weeks remains low, the centre can demonstrate an increase from 14% to 21% in just one year.

Effective provision is a result of accurate assessment of need. Adult users of the centre are forthcoming in their praise of the centre. One parent said of staff, 'They are non-judgemental; never treated me as a scrounger when I was on benefits'. Activities are evaluated regularly and parents are encouraged to share their views informally with staff through questionnaires and evaluation sheets. Additionally, the active parents' panel and advisory board enable parents to contribute effectively to decision-making.

The centre's management team demonstrates drive and commitment to improvement; it uses a wealth of data to evaluate the centre's effectiveness generally well and is aware of the centre's strengths and weaknesses. However, the centre has had little strategic support and direction from the local authority during a turbulent year. As a result, appropriate priority targets for development lack clarity and measurable success. Equally, draft plans for the forthcoming year lack precise detail, clear success criteria and timescales. Although the local authority has planned improvements to the support and challenge system, including a timetabled annual conversation in April to set targets and scrutinise centre plans for the next operation year, these are not yet embedded. Consequently, despite the centre's overall effectiveness being good, its capacity for sustained improvement is currently only satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should work with the centre to improve target-setting for future development by:
 - analysing systematically the comprehensive data available to assess accurately how well the centre is doing
 - setting clear, measurable targets for improvement which are challenging, yet realistic.
- Develop further the current partnerships with schools to strengthen transitional arrangements and secure improvements in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile scores.

- Improve the economic and social well-being of families further by working with partner agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus and adult education, to evaluate the impact of training and help offered with finding employment accurately and develop services accordingly.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Good health advice is given on pregnancy, weaning and immunisations at the midwifery and health visitor clinics; immunisation rates are high at 96–99%. Families receive a range of information related to healthy eating. They enjoy healthy snacks whilst on site and have opportunities to engage with healthy cooking initiatives. As a result, childhood obesity in the Reception Year is the lowest in Hull, although this is not sustained in the longer term as it rises as children progress through school. Breastfeeding rates in the reach are particularly low so the centre has, together with health partners, looked at innovative ways to encourage breastfeeding actively. For example, in partnership with IBreastfeed and part of the 'One Step At A Time' project, the centre manager has secured the support of a local rugby team who plan to wear 'support breastfeeding' t-shirts during their warm-up session for a forthcoming televised game. In addition, a number of peer support volunteers and trained volunteers, known as Doulas, offer advice and support on issues such as birth plans and breastfeeding. As a result of these efforts, breastfeeding at six weeks has increased from 14% to 21% in the last year.

Centre staff help educate families in how to improve children's safety, sensitively reminding parents of the need to be vigilant at all times. Activity sessions in the centre are subject to stringent health and safety risk assessments and the activity-planning takes account of the need to develop children's and adults' understanding of how to keep themselves safe. The highly successful safety equipment scheme enables families to access safety equipment at reduced or no cost, depending on need. Equipment can also be installed professionally if required. As a result, the incidents of accidents in the home to children under five has reduced. Additionally, children who are subject to child protection plans are effectively safeguarded through clear protocols and good safeguarding arrangements. The recently-introduced 'single point of access' to midwifery services whereby families have to opt out of registering with the centre, together with the 'tell it once' system of registrars sharing birth registration data with children centres result in effective assessment of need to ensure that families receive swift support.

The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile point scores show a gradual improvement year on year, but remain below the national and regional scores. Data show that children's communication, language and literacy skills are of particular concern. To tackle this, the centre has worked with Early Years, health and educational partners to support children's language acquisition and two-year-old funding is used for childcare and education for those most in need of intervention and support. Additionally, some parents report how the centre has shown them 'how to play with their children and support their learning'. A small minority of adults is accessing education and training in order to improve their skills and employment

opportunities, but the numbers who successfully complete their training is disappointing. Up to 50% drop out at some point during their courses. The centre is aware of the need to work with partner agencies to ensure that adults access the right training for their needs and recognises that more work needs to be done to raise adults' aspirations and build their confidence. However, for a very small minority, the centre has been instrumental in helping them develop their skills and undertake further training, some to degree level. The 'Family Champions' initiative has had some limited success with four adults securing permanent employment, three are in college and 10 are engaged in voluntary work. Additionally, families are well-signposted to good financial support and guidance.

Parents, including teenage and lone parents, express satisfaction about the centre. Those with low self-esteem or lacking in self-confidence are supported to express their opinions either informally or formally. Parents who sit on the advisory board have felt particularly empowered by their responsibilities as board members. There is a strong parents' panel and members of the community are committed to helping with fundraising events improving the centre resources, such as the garden area.

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	3
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.	3

How good is the provision?

2

Assessment is used effectively to determine the needs of children and parents accessing the centre. There are effective support systems in place to help those most in need of support. CAF processes are used well, in partnership with other agencies, to ensure effective tailored support for individual users. The flexible range of services meets the needs of users well. Registration has increased year on year and those groups whose circumstances make them vulnerable, are engaging well with the centre. Teenage parents wholeheartedly welcome their group which meets their needs particularly well. Additionally, good care, guidance and

support and effective collaborative working with partner agencies secure swift support to families in crisis.

Families describe the centre as 'extremely welcoming' and staff are said to be 'very supportive'. One parent reported that 'staff will always help you if they can.' Another said, 'They make you feel everything is fine and you are normal when you think you're not.' Fathers feel comfortable attending and some parents have significantly increased their confidence levels through staff's sensitive encouragement and support to attend sessions. Family support workers are highly regarded and trusted by local community and evaluations and data show that more fathers, young and lone parents are using centre services.

There are examples of good-quality support work, including the regular play sessions, baby clinics, a rolling training programme for parents, baby massage sessions and a young parents' group. All activity sessions are well-planned, taking account of families' needs. Early Years activities are planned effectively taking account of the areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, the successful collaborative working with one local school which has significantly improved children's readiness for school has yet to be implemented with other schools in the area. Parents are offered a wide range of learning opportunities, although the local culture of poor participation results in high drop-out rates and low achievement.

The centre is very aware of the difficulties and challenges faced by families within its reach area, for example, those who feel isolated in the community, and those suffering from low self-esteem. Past divisions between different areas in the locality are slowly easing due to the centre's success in encouraging families to engage with one another. Those accessing the centre report that they feel valued and respected.

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	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups.	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management are good overall. However, during the last difficult and turbulent year the local authority has not played a fully active role in ensuring that the centre had strategic direction and the provision and services fully met the needs of all target groups. Despite the centre's delivery plan being complex and, in places, difficult to understand, the centre's management team have ensured that services continue to operate and those families most in need receive timely intervention and support. In addition,

registrations increased and outcomes overall improved positively. Consequently, the centre offers good value for money.

Comprehensive data enable management to measure the success of provision on outcomes although data are not yet being systematically analysed. However, self-evaluation is largely accurate and there is a generally good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement. Day-to-day management arrangements are clear and effective. Staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities and feel well-supported and valued by their leaders. However, draft priority targets for forthcoming improvement currently lack precise detail, clearly identified success criteria and defined timescales. Therefore, the capacity to sustain improvement is satisfactory, despite overall effectiveness being good.

Safeguarding training enhances staff's awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities. Their good knowledge of the safeguarding procedures means that they respond swiftly and confidently to concerns. Effective procedures, ratified by the Local Safeguarding Children Board and protocols for sharing information ensure that needs are prioritised well. Robust recruitment and vetting procedures, including Criminal Records Bureau checks, are in place to help ensure staff's suitability to work with children. Partnerships between staff and key agencies are strong, ensuring integrated delivery of services.

The inclusion of all children and families is prioritised well. The centre fulfils its statutory duties and all children and parents, regardless of background have equal access to the provision available. As a result the achievement gap between groups of learners is reducing. The centre is easily accessible to disabled people and has been successful in increasing the engagement of families whose circumstances make them harder to reach.

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 secures 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

<p>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.</p>	<p>2</p>
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Marfleet Children's Centre on 22-23 March 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

As part of the inspection we visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's documentation, and talked with a range of children and adults including parents, staff and workers from partner agencies. We were pleased to speak to so many of you about the centre's work and to listen to your views. We really enjoyed talking to you around the centre and in the various activity sessions you were engaged in.

The centre provides good support to you and your families through the range of quality activities and services it offers. We were pleased to hear how you have benefited from coming to the centre, making new friends and getting involved. Teenage parents in particular enjoy participating in their group as it meets their needs well.

The centre works hard to help you increase your knowledge about play and how children learn through the many play activities and parenting sessions, which you enjoy and find worthwhile. The centre has been working hard with one local school to improve children's readiness for school and we have asked the centre to build on this success by working similarly with other schools in an effort to improve children's learning further.

We also know that many of you receive useful advice on health and nutrition in order to encourage your children to eat more healthily and almost all children are receiving their immunisations. We saw the range of good support offered to new mums to breastfeed their babies to give them the best start in life. As result of the support, breastfeeding rates are improving, although they still remain low in comparison to regional and national rates.

We were pleased to hear how the centre is helping to improve your lives and to hear how some of you feel much more confident as a result of the good care and support offered to you. You told us that the centre is very welcoming and that staff are very supportive as 'nothing is too much trouble for them'. We agree with you. The centre introduces you to a range of learning and training opportunities, but we found that many of you drop out of the courses you embark on. We have, therefore, asked the centre to work with others to ensure that the courses are meeting your needs in order to help you develop your skills, which may help you secure employment in the future.

Centre staff are working very hard to make the centre as good as it can be. They know what the centre's strengths are and what areas can be improved. The centre's advisory board, of which some of you are members, effectively supports and challenges the centre to do more. To help the centre make things even better for you we have asked the local authority to work with the centre's management team to assess how well the centre is doing in order to set clear, challenging targets for further improvement.

Thank you once again for your welcome and your willingness to talk to us. We can see why the staff enjoy working with you and we wish you every success in the future.

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