

Inspection report for Flixton and Woodsend Children's Centre

Local authority	Trafford
Inspection number	365781
Inspection dates	2–3 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Sarah Drake

Centre governance	Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council
Centre leader	Allison Ward
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Acre Hall Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/a

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.

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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, parents and carers, members of the local authority and the advisory board and representatives from a wide range of partner agencies. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Flixton & Woodsend Children's Centre was designated as a Phase 2 centre in January 2008. It has been delivering fully operational services since January 2010 at the centre itself and from a range of venues across the locality. These include the local library, a scout hut, a house belonging to a local church and Acre Hall school hall. The centre operates from within the school grounds, in a single storey, stand alone building which was completed in December 2008. The centre is operated by the local authority and supported by an advisory board comprised of parents, carers and representatives of a range of partner agencies. The centre leader has been in post since the centre opened. Recently, there have been significant staffing changes, including reductions, due to the merger with another children's centre which the head of centre now also leads.

The centre serves an area with much green space to the north west of the borough, bordered by the Manchester ship canal and the river Mersey. A large majority of housing is owner occupied. Most of the rented accommodation is social housing. Around 16% of local children aged under five years live in an area designated as among the 30% most deprived in the country; the others live in less deprived areas. Most families are of White British heritage and around 5% belong to a range of different minority ethnic groups. A higher proportion of families than elsewhere in the borough earn average or above average incomes. Around 10% of families are

dependent on workless benefits. Children's skills on entry to early years provision in the adjacent school are broadly as expected for their age.

The centre offers sessions for: drop-in stay and play, including a gym session; rhyme times; family support; school holiday activities; behaviour support; antenatal clinics and parent classes; baby massage groups; sessions for children with additional needs; a healthy eating group; free dental pack delivery and a childminder group. It also gives users information about how to access other agencies such as Jobcentre Plus and adult education.

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 users and the wider community

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

The overall effectiveness of Flixton and Woodsend Children's Centre is satisfactory. The centre has worked hard to establish a presence in the community and its work is greatly appreciated by those who use its services. Comments such as, 'I don't know what I would have done without them. I definitely would not have my son any longer', confirm the good quality care, guidance and support that staff provide for individuals. However, many activities are at an early stage of development and have yet to have a demonstrable impact on the well-being of significant numbers of local families.

The centre's leaders are becoming adept at using statistical information generated by the local authority to guide the planning of activities. As yet, staff are less effective at evaluating the difference that the activities are making to the users' life prospects. There has been little uptake for sessions organised by staff from adult education or Jobcentre Plus. However, the successful development of a wide range of partnerships with other agencies is proving beneficial. For example, closer links with the school are strengthening the provision to promote children's early reading, writing and physical skills.

Good quality arrangements ensure that children are safeguarded from danger. This means that activities take place in an environment where children feel safe and where they, and their parents and carers, learn how to protect themselves from

harm. The centre is inclusive in its approach. For example, it enables children with significant additional needs to use the facilities and enhances the confidence of their parents and carers to take part in general centre activities.

Staff have a clear understanding of the main points for specific development in the local area and they work well together as a supportive team with strong leadership. Since the opening of Flixton and Woodsend Children's Centre, the significant changes to the provision of children's centres across the area have made it hard for staff to move its development forward as swiftly as they had hoped. Some popular sessions have had to be postponed and the rearrangement of staff's roles has taken up management time. The representatives on the advisory board have also changed and its members are only recently beginning to understand their roles. The centre has satisfactory capacity to improve further.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Introduce rigour into the way in which the centre evaluates the impact of its work on improving the outcomes for children and families.
- Strengthen the role of the advisory board in providing support to the centre and guiding its improvement planning.
- Increase the opportunities for parents to develop their economic stability and independence, including their access to training and employment.

To the local authority:

- Speedily conclude changes to children's centres in the area to enable the centre to plan for the future.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The stay and play gym sessions organised in collaboration with the school are very popular with local families, successfully encouraging them to help their children develop enjoyment in physical activity, thereby reducing the likelihood of obesity. The introduction of healthier snacks at play and stay sessions, together with a shape up course for parents and carers, has persuaded some to make changes to the food that they and their families eat. One commented that, 'I try to walk more places than use the car.' Although there is currently no breastfeeding support at the centre, there is a clear action plan to promote improvements in breastfeeding continuation rates. These were above average in the most recent full year for which data were available. Those who have used the service at the neighbouring centre with which this one has merged speak positively about the support. Similarly, plans are in place to support those who wish to stop smoking but it is not yet possible to see the impact of this work. The centre has had particular success in its work to promote oral health. Its systems are praised as a model in the authority for ensuring the efficient distribution

and use of dental health packs and helping to reduce dental decay in the local area.

The welcoming, child-centred environment ensures that children can enjoy exploring their surroundings in safety. Sensitive support for those with post-natal depression, including the setting up of a group by a centre volunteer, is described as 'a lifeline' by those suffering from this illness, helping them to regain their confidence and to preserve the safety of their children. The centre's work with families whose children have a child protection plan or are the subject of Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes has been effective in preventing some from going into care. Staff's positive response to parental requests for guidance about first aid led to a very well-attended baby saver course which one participant says helped her to save her daughter's life when she choked on a sweet tube lid. Most recent figures show a reduction in local emergency admissions of children to hospital.

Well-led activities such as rhyme time at the local library provide children with a good start to developing enjoyment in learning within a group and following routines. This stands them in good stead when they begin more formal education. Children and their carers join in the singing and actions with equal enthusiasm, learning from each other as they develop their communication and social skills. Those who have attended the sing and sign course for children with additional needs appreciate how much it has helped them to understand and use the communication tools being taught to their children. Information from the primary school about the level of children's skills on entry to the nursery class indicates that the children's centre is playing a positive part in helping those who live in the more deprived areas of its reach area to develop the skills expected for their age, similar to others in the locality. Fun day events, such as messy play and den building, have improved adults' and children's imaginative skills. One child was overheard leaving the centre turning down his parent's suggestion of going home to watch a DVD in favour of 'making another den together'. Other parents comment on how their offspring had become less clingy and more tolerant of other children through attendance at the centre's stay and play sessions.

Children behave well when attending the centre's activities, leading one parent to say that 'my kids turn into angels when they come here'. A sense of respect for others and an expectation that all will help to tidy up instil an awareness of community responsibility. Three volunteers have recently been recruited, the parents' forum has been developing and staff do act on users' views, such as holding holiday sessions in the park. As yet, few parents and carers take the initiative or lead the organising of events. Those who have received coordinated one-to-one support from a range of agencies have had positive outcomes in relation to, for example, obtaining the correct benefits or being helped to return to work. Centre staff are in the initial stages of organising basic skills courses for adults. However, reductions in the local contact with Jobcentre Plus and adult learning staff mean that there is scant evidence that the centre is being fully effective in helping users to strengthen their ability to enhance their economic well-being.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	3
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 users 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 users contribute to decision making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

The centre promotes a suitable range of activities that change on a quarterly basis according to need. Staff are responsive to users' suggestions and have been successful in almost trebling, to 62, the number of fathers that attended stay and play sessions in the most recent full quarter. Attendance at sessions of those who live in the more deprived areas of the centre's reach has doubled so that almost 80% of these families are now involved in the centre's activities. Parents and carers are making increasingly good use of the walk-in sessions for speech and language therapy. The antenatal and parenting sessions run by health workers are very well attended, providing new parents with much appreciated support, advice and monitoring within a welcoming environment close to home. Most of the groups that run are well supported, with some having to turn away potential attendees, but the actual numbers using the centre have decreased due to restrictions created by the merger of two centres.

Staff carefully record and identify the various needs of those referred to them for family support. In particular, they work closely with health visitors and other professionals to complete CAF documentation which enables access to a range of well-targeted support for families in need. Partners offering child and adolescent mental health services praise the way that input from centre staff, such as the Incredible Years programme has helped to prevent inappropriate referral and long waits for appointments with this service. They, and those belonging to other partner agencies, confirm that centre staff are sensitive to early detection of potential problems and quick to take effective action when necessary.

Since the appointment, in August 2010, of a teacher who has responsibility for five children's centres in the area, the planning for activities has improved significantly. Staff now understand the relevance of all sessions to children's learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage and how their evaluations of children's response to activities

can inform their future planning. Centre staff also ensure that they enhance, rather than duplicate, other provision in the area. For example, the centre has mounted popular baby massage sessions for those who also have older children – a service not available through health staff.

Users and professionals alike praise the good levels of care, guidance and support provided by centre staff. The most recent user survey registered an impressive 92% positive response. From offering individuals a helping hand to 'get them through the doors of the centre', to providing continuity for families who have dealings with a wide range of different agencies, the centre acts as a reliable, approachable source of support. Staff take into account the needs of the whole family when allocating support and skilfully coordinate the work of different agencies. Such care has played a crucial role in, for example, keeping children with their families in times of crisis or securing early support for specific difficulties that have enabled children to join school with a statement of special educational needs already in place. In the words of one grateful user, 'I don't know what would happen to me if this wasn't here.'

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The leaders are strong in their determination to develop the centre as a hub of the community. Increasing access to statistical data about, for example, levels of health, employment, education and attendance at centre activities, means the leaders are now able to adapt the provision to target specific groups. Good teamwork and, for example, a recent audit of and adjustments to staff time enable the centre to run smoothly and efficiently, thereby ensuring that it provides satisfactory value for money. Improvement planning and more detailed action plans set out suitable foci, such as improving levels of breastfeeding or children's early communication skills, but do not always identify clear success criteria or targets to aim for. Leaders are at an early stage of evaluating the impact of staff's hard work in terms of improving the well-being of young children. Members of the advisory board are just beginning to understand their role and that of the centre sufficiently fully to be able to offer it support and guidance. Changes to the delivery of children's centre services in the area provide a continuing challenge to the centre's ability to plan and implement quality improvements.

Rigorous recruitment arrangements, staff training and regular risk assessments ensure that safeguarding procedures are well-known to all staff and put into effective, daily action. Staff have a good awareness of how to recognise a potential child protection issue and what to do if they have any concerns. They are welcoming of all comers and fully aware of the centre's important role in improving equality of opportunity, particularly for those living in less advantaged circumstances. Celebrations of festivals from different cultures feature throughout the year and holiday events such as Fun in the Park attract members of the wider community to sample the centre's events.

Partnerships are strong between the centre and a wide range of agencies and professionals and they continue to develop. In particular, recent improvements in the sharing of information between centre staff and health visitors are having a positive impact on delivering continuity of care to families. Similarly, the leader's persistence in working with the school has led to the joint development of activities and sharing of resources to promote children's early learning. As yet, it is too early to be able to judge the impact of such partnerships on improving the life-chances of local 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	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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

None

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk. If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected Flixton and Woodsend Children's Centre on 2 and 3 February 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you very much to those of you who were welcoming to us when we observed you in your groups and to those who spoke with us either in person or on the telephone. It was heartening to hear your many stories of how the centre has helped you and your children whether through activities, such as stay and play, or through one-to-one support in times of particular need. We have judged that the centre staff offer you good levels of care, guidance and support.

The centre helps you and your children to increase your awareness of how to lead healthy lifestyles and is particularly successful in promoting oral health. It is a shame that there is no breastfeeding support currently available at the centre but we know that staff inform you about the service available elsewhere. It is good that they have responded to your requests for information about keeping your children safe, and that this has helped some of you to take timely action when necessary. The centre provides a welcoming venue with good quality resources that help you to feel at ease in your surroundings.

Children's skills on entry to school are broadly as expected for their age. We are pleased that the centre and school staff are working together more closely in order to promote, in particular, children's early reading, writing and physical skills. We know that some information about benefits, jobs and adult education courses is available from the centre but we have asked staff to concentrate on improving this so that the centre helps more of you to have opportunities to improve your families' economic well-being.

Centre staff work well with professionals from other agencies to assess your needs and provide you with continuity of care. The activities that they organise take your requirements into account and you are attending them in increasing numbers. The leaders work hard to respond to the needs of the community and, within the limits of

staffing changes, to offer a wide range of services. We have asked them to improve the ways in which they evaluate the impact of the activities to make sure that they are having the desired outcomes on the well-being of children. We have also asked the members of the advisory board to take a stronger role in supporting and guiding the centre's work. Finally, we have asked the local authority speedily to finalise its plans for children's centres so that the leaders at Flixton and Woodsend can make firm plans for the future to provide even better support to you and your families. We wish you well in the future.

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