

Inspection report for Springwell Park Children's Centre

Local authority	Sefton
Inspection number	362574
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Marian Thomas

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Karen Cox
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Springwell Park Primary
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Springwell Park school and early years provision

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.

An inspection of the maintained nursery 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 one additional inspector and an early years inspector. The inspectors visited a range of provision across the centre. They also held meetings and discussions with senior managers from the centre, parents and carers, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage and childcare partners, health, education and employment professionals. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Springwell Park Centre is a phase one children's centre which has been open since 2006. It is located adjacent to Springwell Primary school whose governing body lead and manage the setting in partnership with the local authority. Services for the centre are provided by a core team of staff who work very closely with outside agencies. An 86 place nursery is based on site, along with an out-of-school and holiday club and a crèche which may look after 10 children at any one time. Nursery staff are employed by the children's centre, but overall responsibility for the nursery rests with the school. The school was inspected concurrently with the children centre. Judgement of the nursery's performance is contained in the school report. The inspection report for the school can be viewed at www.ofsted.gov.uk. Many of the children who join the nursery at age three have levels of attainment below those expected of their age group.

The centre has an advisory board with representatives from partner agencies, the voluntary sector and parents and carers. Springwell Park provides a wide range of services for 641 children up to five-years-old within its reach area. The centre is situated in an area of high deprivation with a significant number of families in the

category of 'hard pressed' most of whom are of White British origin. A small number of families with children with additional needs attend the centre.

Around one in three families with children up to the age of fifteen in the Sefton area are dependent on workless benefits. The percentage of families with children under four who are dependent on benefits is slightly lower than the percentage of families with children aged five to fifteen. The area has a very small population of families from ethnic minority groups. They represent approximately two percent of the population. There are significant health challenges among the population with poor oral hygiene, obesity problems and a high level of teenage pregnancies.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Springwell Park Children's Centre provides a good quality of service for its community. The centre is well led and managed. This can be seen in the warm and friendly welcome which centre staff give to all users. The café area is at the hub of activities and its inclusive and welcoming atmosphere is appreciated by users. A typical view expressed by parents and carers is: 'This centre is the centre of our community'. The centre offers an array of activities which meet the needs of many groups effectively. Its friendly approach ensures that the many drop-in sessions offered are full to capacity with enthusiastic parents and carers and their children.

Close links with community midwives ensure new and prospective mothers benefit from a full range of services which are effective in promoting their health and well-being. The centre runs many targeted group sessions, including stay and play sessions which support parents and carers on courses, drop in advice sessions, and baby massage sessions. These groups provide good opportunities for social and emotional support and further education. Centre users came to talk to the inspectors and said how much they enjoyed the activities offered and how well the caring staff support their needs. The inspection team agreed with their views. However, although the centre has in the past provided sessions to improve the attendance of fathers,

currently few attend.

The centre makes a good contribution to improving the health of families. Centre staff, health care professionals and nursery staff work closely to promote health. Family cookery classes, weaning support groups, and active play sessions for all children help to promote and support a better understanding of healthy lifestyles. As a result, health outcomes are improving from a low baseline. Staff also recognise that further work is needed to engage parents and carers to ensure healthy lifestyles for all families. Children who attend the day care and nursery provision, including those with additional needs, make good progress both socially and emotionally and are well prepared for further learning.

Parents and carers and children say that they feel safe in the centre. High priority is given to the promotion of safety and welfare, and good safeguarding arrangements are in place. All staff are subject to suitability checks. Risk assessments are thorough and rigorously undertaken and the site security is good. Children behave well and interact confidently with staff and each other. They settle quickly and grow in confidence because their contributions are valued and encouraged by staff.

Family relationships are well supported. The centre makes a good contribution to the economic stability of parents and carers through provision of a wide range of accredited courses including childcare, literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT). The views of centre users are requested frequently and have a direct impact on the type and level of courses offered.

Partner agencies work very well together to deliver support and a good range of services. Representatives from different agencies, including health and social care, who spoke with the inspectors praised the centre's open and proactive approach. The good quality of care, guidance and support offered to all families, including those who are hard to reach or facing difficulties, is reflected in comments from parents and carers who felt staff, 'Have supported me through some very difficult times'. Many families benefit from the full range of provision offered by the centre. However, parents and carers of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are less well represented within the children's centre's users. A recent holiday provision for this group was well-attended but this is not reflected in play and stay sessions. A small number of child-minders currently use the facilities provided by the centre.

The centre manager and the senior staff team provide an effective leadership and vision that puts the needs of the community at the heart of the centre's work. As a result, staff are committed to the pursuit of these shared goals.

The local authority and advisory board have a good understanding of the needs of the wider community and of the centre's strengths and areas for development. Self-evaluation is accurate and takes account of contributions from users, staff and partners. It is well supported by data provided by the local authority. Plans for improvement are well defined and target driven. The success of the centre is

demonstrated very well by the improving outcomes in children's health and educational achievement. As a result, the centre has a good capacity to improve further and offers good value for money.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve the variety and timing of provision within the children's centre to encourage fathers to attend.
- Develop stronger relationships with families of children with additional needs in order to increase the attendance of this group at the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The good outcomes for children and families who use the centre are continuing to improve at a fast pace. Improving outcomes in health are the result of strong partnerships between midwives and the outreach team. Together they consistently promote healthy lifestyles in family sessions. The variety of activities and stay and play sessions make a strong contribution to both the physical and emotional health of parents and carers and children. One parent told the inspection team: 'Coming here changed my life and helped me cope better with my child's behaviour'. The centre is proactive in its engagement with many different initiatives including developing a café with internet access which families are using with increasing confidence.

Staff support families in need well and help to ensure that children are safe. Early intervention strategies are effective at preventing difficulties escalating. Parents and carers who spoke with inspectors have a good awareness of how to keep their children safe as a result of safety awareness initiatives delivered by centre staff. These include information from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA). One parent commented: 'The RoSPA information helped me to identify dangers in my home I hadn't seen before'.

Children who attend nursery provision and/or stay and play sessions make good progress in their learning. Parents', carers' and children's enjoyment is evident through the very high attendance at drop-in activities and stay and play sessions. All children are happy and confident in their interactions with adults and each other. Despite the low starting points and additional needs of many of the children, an increasing number are beginning to achieve age appropriate targets within the Early Years Foundation Stage profile. Due to a recent increased emphasis on communication and numeracy skills across the provision an increasing number of children are now nearing age appropriate levels in communication, language and literacy. This ensures that children are well prepared when they transfer to school. The uptake and quality of accredited courses demonstrates the success of the

centre's contribution to the economic well-being of its users.

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	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 users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

Centre staff are well trained, and use a sensitive approach when assessing the needs of parents and carers and carers. They then ensure that the services needed to support them are provided in a timely manner. An individual approach is the key to much of the centre's success. One user explained that she is now actively seeking work after a long period out of the workplace thanks to centre staff who tailored support and training to meet her needs and build her confidence.

Cookery, basic skills and working with children are just some of the courses running at the centre, many of which are accredited. These, combined with close links with both Connexions and Jobcentre Plus services help users and parents and carers to maximise their skills and help them to improve their employment prospects whatever their level of need. One user described how staff 'had just made me believe I could work again after having my children and now I am in a job I enjoy'.

Staff frequently play a leading and influential role in implementing the common assessment framework (CAF) starting whenever they feel a family is in need. Analysis of case studies during the inspection showed an excellent level of engagement with partner agencies for the benefit of parents and carers. An effective child protection plan is in place, which ensures centre staff work closely with social services and the child protection team. The centre provides a much needed resource for these services and for families in crisis.

The centre has strong working links with the school on site. Staff from both units now work together to ensure assessment is used effectively to record children's progress and to inform teaching and learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The area has few childminders but they are welcomed to the centre and users are

well signposted to their services.

The effective approach by the centre to care, guidance and support is clearly demonstrated in the good uptake by users from the more economically challenged districts of their catchment area. Close working relationships between the centre's link health visitor and midwives ensure that hard to reach families are identified and supported. Members of a voluntary organisation work alongside centre staff to deliver a successful outreach service, which is proactive in taking services to groups who are hard to reach and known to be vulnerable.

The learning and personal development of all children is promoted effectively. Whilst parents and carers praise the centre's stay and play sessions which are popular with mums, fewer dads engage with these activities. Centre staff are aware of this and have conducted an audit and planned future activities, however at the time of the inspection these had yet to start.

During the summer holidays, centre staff organised sessions specifically to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This proved to be popular with families however this has not resulted in an increase in children with additional needs attending stay and play sessions. The centre has developed good links with a carers' organisation which it hopes will improve links with these families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
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?

2

The strong leadership of the centre's management team in conjunction with the school's executive head teacher is continuing to improve the centre and is providing good outcomes for users. Leaders have high expectations for the community and this aspiration is at the heart of the centre's work. The school's governing body, local authority, advisory board and staff work closely together and are proactive in taking services out to hard to reach and vulnerable families within the community. The advisory board has excellent representation from partner agencies and parents and carers. As a result, they have a good understanding of the centre's strengths and areas for improvement and are assisting the governing body in looking for ways of improving the centre's role within the community. Future targets have been set,

based on a good level of self-evaluation, data analysis and input from staff and users. This has resulted in quality action planning supported by excellent partnership working.

The inspection team spoke with representatives from a range of agencies, all of whom spoke highly of the centre’s open approach to working in partnership for the benefit of the community. There are active partnerships with health professionals, social care, a carers' group, local schools, early years settings, Connexions service, the local college and the police. The strength of these relationships secures the health, safety and achievement of families and children well, including those with additional needs.

Good quality safeguarding arrangements are supported by the strength of communication and collaboration between agencies to ensure children are safeguarded at all times. Staff checks, vetting and recruitment processes meet current guidelines and the majority of staff have up to date training in safeguarding, child protection and first-aid.

The centre is an inclusive setting and promotes equality and celebrates diversity well through celebrating festivals and supporting the use of users’ first languages. Staff are sensitive to the needs of those who use its services. There is a good level of registration from the majority of groups. For example, although ethnic minority groups represent less than two percent of the centre’s catchment they represent three percent of centre users. The centre is a cohesive community where positive relationships flourish. The key groups including families from different ethnic groups receive support which is tailored to their needs and delivered through strong partnership working.

The local authority effectively supports the centre’s self-evaluation and action planning by providing a comprehensive data set based on national indicators and local data.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	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	2

adults	
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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	2

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

The Inspection of Springwell Park Primary school took place at the same time as the Children's centre. Information was shared around the judgement of the on-site nursery for the benefit of both inspections.

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 the Springwell Park Children's Centre on 18–19 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

During our visit, we looked at the centre's plans and documents and talked to the professionals who work with you. Many of you went out of your way to tell us how well you feel the centre supports you and your children.

You told us that staff are very friendly, hard working and support you well. We agree with you. We found the centre to be welcoming to families with lots of different activities for everyone. We really enjoyed joining you in the stay and play and baby massage sessions. We feel the staff have a good level of expertise and are good at offering practical and emotional support to families who need it.

The centre does many things well. Professionals from the different agencies work exceptionally well together to make sure you receive the right advice and support. Those of you who are facing difficult or complex problems receive support and staff provide a good standard of care, guidance and support for all

centre users. Their inclusive approach means that families from different parts of the community are all welcome. The nursery, and stay and play sessions provide good support for all children, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

We feel the centre makes a very good contribution to improving families' health and children's educational achievement. It does this through the many stay and play sessions, the nursery, as well as visiting some of you at home. As a result of the good work of the centre, health outcomes are improving and children make good progress in their learning and personal development. This means that they are well prepared for school. You told us that you feel safe at the centre. This reflects the work the centre does to promote safety and welfare through its safeguarding arrangements.

We were impressed by the behaviour of the children we met as they confidently explored their learning environment. We were also impressed by the positive and supportive relationships you have with one another and with your children.

The centre makes a good contribution to help improve the economic stability of its users. Some of you told us how much you were gaining from opportunities for further training and work experience. Many of you told us how much you had gained from meeting other parents and carers in similar circumstances through groups and activities at the centre. The centre manager provides good leadership. She is well supported by the local authority, the advisory board, and the headteacher and school governors. We feel all staff are ambitious for everyone in the community and are enthusiastic and hard working. They have a good understanding of your needs and are striving to improve and make things even better. Because of this, we think they have a good capacity to bring about further improvements.

We have asked centre leaders to do two things to further improve the work of the centre.

- To continue to work with you to provide activities which encourage more dads to come to the centre.
- To work more closely with families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities to ensure their needs and their children's needs are fully met.

Thank you very much for your welcome and openness with inspectors. We really enjoyed talking with you and seeing the work of the centre. We wish you every success in the future.

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