

Inspection report for Phoenix Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Inspection number	362540
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Reporting inspector	Christine McIlwaine

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Joanne Parry
Date of previous inspection	NA
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Linked school if applicable	St Mary & St Paul's C of E Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY332933 Sue Gill Nursery at St Mary & St Paul's

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 also 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.

The inspectors held meetings with parents, carers, the centre's leadership, management and staff, partnership and local authority representatives.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation. The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector and an early years inspector.

Information about the centre

Phoenix Children's Centre is a phase 1 centre, opened in 2006. It is managed by Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council. The centre is based within St Mary and St Paul's C of E Primary school in Prescot in the borough of Knowsley. It operates as part of Whiston Area Children's Centres model. The centre manager has been in post for just over 19 months and manages two centres, which share some services in partnership. The other site is at Southmead, Whiston. One team delivers services across two sites.

The centre serves a community that includes some of the 30% most deprived wards in the country. Over 24% of children in the Phoenix reach area live in households dependent on workless benefits. The area is predominately of White British heritage with fewer than 3% from minority ethnic groups.

The centre provides a range of services including family support, outreach and home visiting, community-based health services including a public health midwife, maternity and family nurses and advice on training and employability. The centre also supports a childminder group.

A management advisory board comprising parent, carer, and partnership representatives, statutory and voluntary representatives supports the centre. Childcare and education are provided on the same site by the school and nursery.

The nursery is governed by the school and has places for 12 under-two-year olds and for 20 children aged two to five years. Many children who access the children’s centre have levels of achievement and skills significantly below those expected for their age.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children’s centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for 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

Phoenix Children’s Centre is a good and improving centre that secures good outcomes for children and their families. Strong leadership and good teamwork among staff ensure that families benefit from an outstanding range of services that are targeted effectively to meet the needs of particular individuals and groups. Throughout the inspection, parents and carers were eager to share their experiences of how they and their children benefit from attending the centre. In some cases, particularly following a crisis, they reported that their lives had been transformed.

The centre works exceptionally well with a wide range of partners to identify and provide services to users. Partners include health and social care, including maternity services, public health services, teachers, housing and benefit agencies, voluntary agencies and also the borough-wide services that are provided by Knowsley. Good joint outreach work ensures that the centre reaches some of the families whose needs are greatest. There is very good communication at all levels with parents, the local authority, service providers and between the centre staff. The team is very enthusiastic and team morale is high.

Care, guidance and support for users are outstanding. Assessment of needs is timely and thorough. Well-planned and targeted sessions ensure that the needs of vulnerable children and families are particularly well met. In some cases, parents told inspectors that they would not have survived without the help of the centre. They reported that they felt alone and depressed before being invited to the centre. Families, including those who are often hard to reach, use the centre regularly.

The centre makes a good contribution to improving the health of families. Healthy

lifestyles for families are promoted through a variety of initiatives. Healthy eating is encouraged and fresh fruit and water are readily available to users. Parents state that they have learnt different ways of shopping to avoid unhealthy eating habits stating that their kitchen cupboards are transformed.

Many users benefit from the way in which the centre supports individuals with emotional or mental health problems such as depression or feelings of isolation. Children and their parents enjoy attending the centre. They enjoy the variety of sessions including accredited and non-accredited training for adults. For example, courses on baby massage and healthy cooking and eating are well attended. Parents and carers told inspectors that they appreciate the support and advice they receive from qualified support workers in sessions such as 'stay and play'. They report good improvements in children's social and emotional development as well as in literacy and language development. They become more confident in parenting skills and in their ability to communicate. They say they feel welcome and safe in the centre.

Relationships within the centre between staff and with users are very positive with parents expressing appreciation for the support they are given. Many are volunteering at the centre or are acting as advocates for the service in their local community. Parents are well represented on the advisory board and are very enthusiastic about the centre and what it offers them. However, the advisory board does not provide sufficient challenge to the centre to improve provision and outcomes.

The centre and its staff have a good understanding of how to keep children safe and children's behaviour demonstrates they understand how to stay safe too. For example, children are becoming aware of dangers inside and outside the centre. Users report that they feel safe and secure in the centre. The centre's commitment to promoting equality and diversity is clear. Children from different backgrounds and with different abilities are supported with sensitivity and awareness of their needs.

The use of data to measure the impact of the services provided is currently underdeveloped. The centre manager recognises this. Work is underway with new and improved ways of capturing information to provide a clearer and more robust evaluation of the centre's achievements. The wider authority provides a good range of data but there is insufficient local data for the Prescot area. The centre and the local authority are working effectively together to improve the availability of this data and much work has already been completed. For example, it is now possible to measure breast-feeding rates accurately and identify trends and areas for intervention. Similarly, data about live births are currently being provided to aid the identification of all children in the reach area. The centre evaluates the impact of each activity and individual service and also uses evaluations from parents to guide the prioritisation of services.

The centre has good support from the local authority, strong leadership, clear priorities and a realistic view of strengths and areas for improvement in the service. This provides the centre with good capacity to build on their successes in the future

and to improve further the outcomes for families and children.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Continue to develop and improve the ways in which the services are evaluated to drive quality improvement and enable clearer target-setting.
- Improve and provide further support to the advisory board to help them provide more challenge to the centre.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for children and their families are good. Healthy lifestyles for families are promoted through initiatives such as healthy cooking sessions and projects such as the healthy eating and nutrition for the really young (HENRY) project and other classes. The centre has targeted some high levels of obesity, particularly in certain groups of children, and healthy eating is encouraged in all sessions. Fresh fruit and water are readily available to users at no charge. Parents indicate that they have changed their shopping and cooking habits, dramatically reducing sugar intake through buying less processed food after attending sessions. Toothbrushes are freely distributed to encourage dental hygiene. Opportunities for outdoor play are available to promote children's physical development. Baby massage and 'Bosom buddies' sessions help mothers share breastfeeding and child rearing tips. Breastfeeding initiation and continuation rates have increased significantly over the past three years, although the increase in the latter has been slower during last year. 'Little explorer' sessions for babies and parents or carers help develop friendships and promote valuable parenting skills such as healthy weaning.

Highly effective partnerships with local health professionals, such as the midwifery and family nursing services, provide easily accessible support and advice to families. These services include antenatal sessions at the Southmead centre. Other partners, such as Knowsley Housing Trust work to identify and refer families in crisis and targeted services, such as small group sessions, are effectively provided. Children from minority ethnic families are effectively and sensitively supported with speech and language development where the need has been identified. Children are learning healthy habits such as regular hand washing.

Parents and carers who have suffered from stress-related or post-natal depression are well supported. Staff are particularly good at identifying and targeting services to these families. Families praise this approach and value highly the support they receive saying, 'If it wasn't for this centre I wouldn't be here today', and, 'We were going under and they saved us'. Many of these users are now beginning to volunteer

and become advocates for the services within their local community. Children are settled and in strong and trusting relationships underpinned by a good key worker system and appropriate skills. The emotional health of the most vulnerable children is improved and development takes place within a safe environment. In targeted 'stay and play' sessions, staff demonstrate a clear focus on the needs of the child and on the early learning goals. Very vulnerable groups, for example families with children with attention deficit, are well supported in targeted sessions, thus avoiding potential social isolation.

Families report that they are learning more useful ways of helping children to develop. They feel that their children's social skills and emotional strengths are improving. Families appreciate the ways that the centre has helped them to overcome isolation, especially when new to the area.

Good procedures ensure that children are safeguarded well. Users say that they feel safe and children display appropriate behaviour, for example demonstrating awareness of safety while using scissors or during outdoor play. Prompt intervention is used effectively to support families and children at risk. Children develop trusting relationships with adults. Partnership working with local community police, health visitors and other organisations is helping to raise families' awareness of safety. Family support practitioners undertake home visits to advise on safety. The number of emergency referrals to hospital has reduced overall in the borough but data are not available to show the actual contribution of the Phoenix Children's Centre.

The extent to which children and parents and carers enjoy and achieve is good. Phoenix Children's Centre is very effective in overcoming some of the barriers to children's achievement. Children make good progress from their starting points to develop skills that help them in the future. Children develop a good awareness of differences and similarities between themselves and others and show mutual respect. They are successfully developing skills for the future. Improved ways of working within the team contribute to cohesive provision that is focused and relevant. Children are now more ready for the next phase of education and transition plans for vulnerable children are good.

Parents and carers develop increased confidence and self-esteem through taking part in centre activities. They take part in useful learning programmes such as first aid and food hygiene. Some parents have progressed to further accredited qualifications such as National Vocational Qualifications, leading to employment for some. Parents and carers have developed improved communication skills. For example, user groups are well represented on the advisory board and are confident to express opinions about the service.

The centre works very well with partners such as Job Centre Plus and the local Citizens Advice Bureau to provide services to help users gain information about training and employment and economic stability.

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

The centre meets its core offer well. Centre staff know the area well and have a very good knowledge of the needs of individual users. Excellent partnership working ensures that families are referred quickly and efficiently to the centre for assessment and early intervention where necessary. Good judgments made by staff ensure that targeted support is made available. Good use is made of the common assessment framework in ensuring that support is quickly put in place for families in crisis. The centre leads on the Transforming Early Years project in the borough. This looks at innovative ways of delivering early years provision to those families who would benefit most from children's centre services. Trained volunteers are carrying out ethnographic research to assess needs, particularly in hard-to-reach families. 'Action weeks', working with a range of partners, have also been effective in assessing local needs. Parents and carers are encouraged to evaluate the services they receive and feedback is acted upon. For example, an outdoor play area was reopened to meet user needs. The centre is developing improved ways of collecting user feedback to further enhance the services it offers.

Learning, development and enjoyment are promoted well. Parents and carers speak highly of the opportunities that have been provided by the centre and the impact these have had on their families. They report the development of increased confidence and good opportunities to contribute to their own community with support from the centre. They enjoy attending the centre and are enthusiastic and keen to recommend the service in their own locality. Children's achievements are celebrated with graduation day photographs.

The range of services available through the centre is outstanding. Activities meet the

needs and interests of the community well with a very good range and variety of activities. These include universal and targeted services such as baby massage, 'stay and play' and courses such as first aid and basic food hygiene supported by a crèche facility. Some users have been supported to undertake volunteer qualifications. Integrated working, such as with the library service is very effective in improving literacy and language development.

The centre adapts services flexibly to meet user needs, for example, by timetabling 'stay and play' sessions to allow a greater choice for users or to allow families with a recognised need to attend. Outreach working with partners is strong and services continue to develop to meet the identified needs of families in the area. For example, some services have been targeted at homeless families in a particular area. Some groups are now self-directed and others are being supported to form as independent groups for the future. The centre is taking action to improve further the way in which information is collected and used to evaluate the impact of services.

The quality of care and personalised support for families in crisis is outstanding. Services are well coordinated to support these families from identification to the provision of tailored support services. Users believe, in their words, 'We would have gone under', without the care and support from the centre. Thorough and highly professional assessment of needs leads to carefully targeted and sensitive support using resources to best effect. Families report life-changing experiences and want to tell others about the service they have received.

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	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management are good. Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council provides good, strategic direction and support to the centre. Operational management is good and a strong team is well supported and deployed very effectively. Team members have a variety of skills and competencies and are supervised well. Priorities are clearly identified and communicated. Partnerships are managed very well and partners take an active role in promoting high quality, integrated provision. The sharing of information is good and benefits families using the centre. The advisory board has good parent representation operating over two

centres. Members are very enthusiastic but do not provide a sufficient level of challenge to effectively aid the evaluation and improvement of services.

Leaders and managers have a clear view of the provision and know what improvements should be made. Good self-assessment leads to accurate judgments about the provision but is over descriptive and lacks the means to measure the effectiveness of all its services through the use of robust data. Useful data are collected at borough level but are not always sufficiently locally focused to enable evaluation of services in the area. The centre is working on new and improved ways of evaluating the services and effectively measuring the impact they have. There is clear evidence of the service narrowing the gap for some of the most disadvantaged children.

Safeguarding procedures and processes are robust and effective. The centre adopts recommended good practice across all areas of its work. Users feel safe and children demonstrate appropriate behaviours. Training and checks are in place for all staff and partners where appropriate. Users report very high levels of satisfaction and are engaging well with the centre. Resources are well deployed and the centre provides a good environment for the community it serves providing good value for money. The provision or services offered by the centre are well used and engage vulnerable groups in the community. Groups are supported to be self-sustaining by, for example, setting out their own constitution and applying for funding.

Equality and diversity are promoted successfully. Phoenix children’s centre is effective in removing barriers to access by carefully targeted provision. The service engages users from different groups in the area. It has responded to the needs of minority groups, such as fathers, by providing targeted provision. For example, ‘Super Saturdays’ provide an opportunity for fathers to develop skills in parenting and enjoy the company of their children and other fathers.

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

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Phoenix Children's Centre on 15 and 16 November 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

The children's centre provides an outstanding range of services that are helping children and families in the Prescot and Whiston areas. Throughout the inspection, parents and carers were keen to tell us how they had benefited from support provided by the centre. We were also impressed by the very positive comments users made about the services on offer and by the case studies that show how lives have been transformed through links with the centre.

The centre is working very well with partners such as health and social care, housing, training agencies and schools and is well supported by Knowsley Borough Council. It offers good quality services to the whole community. It helps many children, especially those who may be disadvantaged in some way, to get a good start in life. There are also many examples of the centre winning the confidence of adults so that many move on from occasional contact and become regular users of the centre. A good number serve as volunteer workers in the centre. Some have gained further skills and knowledge through attending the centre. Families and individuals also value the support offered through home visits and other outreach work.

The centre works closely with Social Care to ensure the safety of children. The centre's commitment to promoting equality and diversity is clear. Children, including those with disabilities, gain much from the imaginative range of activities on offer. They make good progress when attending 'stay and play', 'Super Saturdays' and other groups. In particular, the centre can show how it is improving children's health and development through communication and play activities and specialised courses such as healthy eating and nutrition for the really young (HENRY). The centre is contributing well to their future life chances.

Parents and carers are represented on the Management Advisory Board and are enthusiastic advocates of the centre. The senior leadership team has the qualities necessary to improve the centre still further and works hard to evaluate services with a view to improving them.

The inspectors have made the following recommendations to help improve the centre.

- Continue to develop and improve the ways in which the services are evaluated to drive quality improvement and enable clearer target-setting.

- Improve and provide further support to the advisory board to help them provide more challenge to the centre.

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