

Inspection report for Somerstown Children's Centre

Local authority	Portsmouth City Council
Inspection number	363497
Inspection dates	7–8 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Susan Mann HMI

Centre governance	Portsmouth City Council
Centre leader	Edwina Brennan
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Linked school, if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	PAWS Community Nursery 143470

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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. The inspectors held meetings with centre users, managers and frontline staff, partners and representatives from the local authority. They also visited the linked early years provision at PAWS Community Nursery and the satellite provision at the Kings Centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Somerstown Children's Centre was designated in October 2005. Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority in conjunction with a Partnership Board and includes providers, members of the local community and users who attend the children's centre. The children's centre has a linked site at the King's Centre, 37 Elm Grove, Portsmouth, which also provides children's centre activities and services. Both centres offer accessible provision to families with disabilities.

The linked early years full daycare provision is PAWS community day nursery, which is part of Somers Park Primary School and is registered to provide up to 120 places for children aged under eight years. Most children in the area enter school with levels of attainment below national and local authority averages.

The children's centre serves an area that has been identified as highly disadvantaged in Portsmouth, with a significant number of children living in workless households. The majority of families (56%) in the Somerstown reach area are lone parents and 11.4% of Portsmouth's teenage parents live in the area. There are a number of Bangladeshi and African families living in the area and more recently a significant number of families from a wide range of minority ethnic groups populate the area served by the centre. There is a woman's refuge and two hostels situated within the Somerstown reach area and a significant amount of temporary accommodation, resulting in a highly mobile population (30%).

Somerstown Children’s Centre offers all elements of the core offer, including integrated childcare and early learning, health services, outreach and family support.

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

The overall effectiveness of the centre is good, with five aspects that are outstanding. Those in charge have an accurate view of the centre’s strengths and areas for improvement, and they are focused on meeting the needs of their users well. There are exceptional relationships with key partners, which means that services are very cohesive. These partners are closely involved with the evaluation and improvement of services, resulting in a very positive impact on outcomes for all users.

The centre collects a large amount of data from a number of sources such as health services and the local authority. It also gathers data about the attendance at groups, events and activities offered by the centre. This information is used to good effect to target its services to those most in need of them. Staff have an excellent understanding of individual users’ needs, including those who are most vulnerable. Outreach is highly effective in supporting families who may be harder to engage.

The centre’s capacity to improve further is good. The evaluation of services is robust and informs the review of activities and services. The centre seeks the views of its users on a regular basis and their opinions shape future provision. Evaluation is generally used effectively throughout and the centre has begun to seek and use children’s feedback in this. However, evaluation is not wholly consistent and rigorous for all services and users. Managers realise that the development of these systems can be used more precisely and consistently to have an even greater impact on improving provision.

Outcomes for users are good and improving. Many users benefit from the on-site health services such as the child health clinic. Participants thoroughly enjoy their weekly cookery sessions, where they learn to make a range of nutritious meals in a

friendly and enabling environment. One parent commented, 'It's a really good way to get the kids to try new things and mine eat a lot more fruit and veg now.' The centre nurtures the emotional well-being of its users through giving caring and individual attention to those most in need. Supported childcare places provide respite and opportunities for adults to engage better in sessions. Children using the crèche and other onsite childcare demonstrate strong relationships with the staff who care for them. The provision for children is of good quality because it is caring and supports children's development in all areas of learning. The staff are beginning to implement all aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage and a play-based curriculum is being established. The centre has highlighted this as an area for further improvement and there have been some recent initiatives put in place. They are supported by the centre's qualified teacher advisor to cultivate more child-initiated play in order to promote children's learning and development.

The outcomes for users to make a positive contribution are outstanding because users are actively involved in centre governance. The centre plays a significant role in the life of the community. The parents' forum, Somerstown Matters, is very active and plays an important part in representing and promoting the parents' opinions in the leadership and management of the centre. They contribute to the self-evaluation process and have implemented improvements in services. There is an exceptionally successful parent volunteer programme, where parents can receive high quality training and become actively involved in the work of the centre in meaningful ways.

The centre is inclusive and welcoming to all. One parent commented, 'Everyone is welcome in our centre, we are pleased to see everyone.' There are successful strategies to engage those users who are vulnerable or hard to reach as well as those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Families from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds value the multicultural group, Jagoron, because they can enjoy one another's company and socialise with each other. All users of the centre appreciate the friendly environment it offers. The centre employs exemplary safeguarding practice. Adults say they feel safe and able to speak freely in a confidential atmosphere. The centre's designated person for safeguarding children's welfare is extremely knowledgeable and experienced in current procedures and interagency working. All staff and parent volunteers receive high quality training on how to protect children's welfare so that practice is wholly robust and consistent. Staff at the centre are very proactive in promoting safety thoroughly in all services offered at the centre, such as in parenting classes and in cookery activities, so that parents can keep themselves and their children safe in the home.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Develop further the systems of evaluation across all user groups, including children, to improve the monitoring and effectiveness of services and activities.
- Continue to develop the quality of childcare provision in order to enhance

outcomes for children by extending opportunities for child-initiated play and embedding the use of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes for the children and families who use the centre are good. Physical and emotional health is promoted well. Analysis of data shows that many aspects are improving. Case studies indicate that the Life Skills group has had a significant impact in helping mothers who suffer from post-natal depression to cope better and improve life for themselves and their families. The taxi scheme, which provides transportation to hospital and other medical appointments, has played a very important part in ensuring children receive needed medical diagnosis and outpatient treatment in a timely manner. Users feel extremely safe at the centre and the premises are secure and well maintained.

Children settle quickly in the crèche. Adults trust staff completely to maintain confidentiality and they are happy to discuss personal issues with centre staff. One parent said about these discussions, 'They are never judgemental and everything is confidential.' In particular, those families facing change or difficulties in their lives receive an exceptional level of tailored support to help them cope well. For example, the children's centre provides a crèche service to care for the children of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants while parents access legal and housing advice. A number of well-attended groups such as those for food hygiene and cooking give parents knowledge and confidence to keep themselves and their families safe. Teenage parents have attended the Mellow Parenting group, which promotes safe and caring parenting skills.

Children supported by the Common Assessment Framework are extremely well cared for through excellent inter-agency working and dedicated centre staff who are trained and knowledgeable about how best to promote their welfare. Children subject to a child protection plan benefit from exceptional improvement in their outcomes as a result of the centre's involvement. This is because staff's knowledge of protocols and interagency working is exemplary and they are persistent and determined to ensure the best possible outcomes for the child. Supported childcare places play a vital role in many cases to provide respite for the parent and child when needed. In addition, staff help parents provide some of the essentials for their children's development and well-being by funding the purchase of equipment such as children's beds or a highchair.

Children make good progress through the Early Years Foundation Stage, both at the linked nursery and in the centre childcare. They enjoy their interaction with staff and have fun playing with resources that are well suited to their stage of development. Many children have some difficulties with their speech and language and a focus on developing this by the centre's speech and language therapist and assistant has seen a marked improvement. Sessions such as Come and Sing, Toddler Talk and Nursery

Narrative develop speech and language skills through an appealing format which children and parents enjoy. Adult users express a high level of enjoyment when using all the services of the centre. There is much evidence of improved outcomes for adults who undertake training at the centre. One parent said, 'The portfolios are fabulous... (they) help to keep track of everything we have done and it will be good for future employers.' Many parent volunteers progress on to employment as a result of the experience and skills they have gained at the centre. One parent stated, 'I have gained experience and qualifications to help me with my future and it has cost me nothing but a little time.'

Children's behaviour at the centre is very good. They demonstrate positive relationships with staff caring for them and they become more self-assured as a result. Adults are routinely engaged in the governance of the centre and work alongside the leadership team to evaluate provision and forming action plans. Users speak of the centre with great pride in what it achieves in their community, and all demonstrate an extremely strong sense of belonging.

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	1
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	1
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 is extremely effective at assessing the needs of families who use its services because it has accurate knowledge of the centre's hard-to-reach groups. Outreach work is very good at engaging the most vulnerable or isolated groups and this is supported by very effective partnership working with Home-Start. One parent who has benefitted from the outreach service said, 'If I hadn't had Home-Start I don't think I would have managed. I wasn't coping.' She went on to say, 'My life is more organised.' The centre provides ongoing consistency for provision for all users. Work with the two hostels and the refuge located in the centre's reach area is effective in improving outcomes for these families and many progress on to accessing groups at the centre. Groups held at the King's Centre are popular and the

central location highlights the services to new users.

There is a strong focus on purposeful learning and development for all users and this is centred on improving outcomes and promoting well-being. The centre is particularly good at celebrating success and promoting self-confidence in its adult users. There is well-integrated provision which covers a wide range of opportunities for adults to learn and enhance their personal development. Aligned crèche provision means that parents can access these courses without worrying about having to arrange childcare. Participation rates are monitored and demonstrate a good level of user engagement. The level of care, guidance and support provided by the centre is good. Early years childcare commissioned by the centre at PAWS Community Nursery and onsite childcare provision at the centre provide good experiences for children to learn through play. Play sessions are run in the hostels supported by the centre to help engage parents and children in enjoyable activities that will promote children's development. The centre has already identified that the quality of provision for childcare at the centre should be enhanced further and has taken steps to implement these developments. Guidance given to families to help them find employment or help with how to stop smoking, for example, makes a positive difference to their lives.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
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 leadership of the centre is good. The managers provide strong leadership that is warm and caring. They are strongly focused on meeting the needs of the community served by the centre. The local authority provides a clear framework for the centre and has a good strategic overview. The partnership board oversees three centres linked in the Heart of Portsmouth area and includes representation from the key partners, including users. The partnership board is involved in evaluation of services and the centre's work, and has recognised that this should be more rigorous. Somerstown Matters, the parent forum, is a very active and influential body which provides an effective link between the parents and the leadership and management of the centre. The managers of the centre take account of users' views. For example, parents identified that there was a gap in provision for children aged two and under, so Stepping Stones was introduced to the centre's activity timetable. Resources are

managed well to provide services for those who need them. The centre makes clear distinctions between some groups that are for all, and some that are specifically for targeted groups who will benefit most from attending. The centre provides good value for money.

All relevant partners and users are involved in the centre evaluation process, which is accurate and ensures provision meets users' needs well. This process identifies the priorities for the centre's action planning for future improvements and development. The leadership team have put steps in place to enhance this system to be more rigorous and to incorporate all users' views consistently, including those of children. The managers of the centre have clear expectations of high quality provision at the centre. They have an infectious enthusiasm and commitment to ongoing development and this is transferred to staff and users. As a result, outcomes are good in all areas, outstanding in some, and improving in all aspects.

The centre has a very inclusive ethos and it actively promotes equality and diversity through everyday life and through groups which meet the needs of the community. There has been success at engaging fathers in events on Saturdays and those who attend say they have found them very enjoyable. The centre has identified the needs of the community and provides for particular groups, including Bangladeshi families, and these are well attended. Those users who speak English as an additional language receive good support to access centre services and activities. There is a strong focus on helping children to improve their communication, language and literacy to improve their achievement and be better prepared for starting school.

The centre has excellent safeguarding provision. All who work with children are subject to the most rigorous checking and monitoring process to ensure their suitability. Procedures to identify and refer concerns are thorough so that no issues are overlooked. Staff and partners receive regular training and frequent updates to ensure they maintain a high level of awareness and protocols. Safeguarding procedures are subject to a rigorous audit procedure to assess their impact and evaluate their effectiveness so that areas for development can be followed up.

Partnership working with a wide range of agencies is exemplary. Partners are wholly engaged, from the strategic management level down to the front-line delivery of services. Services are wholly integrated so that users benefit from collaborative provision which significantly improves outcomes. The managers of the centre are very committed to promoting these partnerships to achieve the best possible range of services. Users are fully involved in the evaluation of these partnerships and services, which ensures they continue to meet the requirements of the families who need them.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<p>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</p>	<p>2</p>
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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 adults	1
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 early years childcare commissioned by the centre at PAWS Community Nursery was last inspected by Ofsted in July 2009 and the quality of childcare and education was judged to be good. During the course of this children's centre inspection, an inspector visited the setting and the evidence collected suggests that this is still the case.

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 Somerstown children's centre on 7–8 October 2010. We judged the centre to be good overall.

We would like to thank those of you who took the time to meet with us and talk about the centre to help us with the inspection. It was very useful to speak with you about what the centre means from your personal point of view. Our discussions with you also helped us to understand the excellent work of Somerstown Matters and how it influences leadership decisions of the centre to make sure that parents' views are represented well.

Your children's centre has many good features and some that are excellent. Procedures for making sure children are protected from possible harm and abuse are very good, and you feel that you and your children are extremely safe when at the centre.

Those of you we spoke to during the inspection told us that Somerstown is a welcoming children's centre that meets your needs well. We agree with this view and found the managers take care to know the local area and make sure that services available at the centre meet the community's needs. The centre management team and the local authority work very well with other service providers such as Home-Start and the health team to provide services that help families in the local area. Many of you find the activities provided in the King's Centre are also more convenient to attend.

All parts of the centre's work are evaluated to decide whether they are working well, and to plan the next steps of development. Children have just started to be involved in this process. We have asked the centre to consider ways to develop this process further and the centre have already decided to make this system of assessment more thorough.

The childcare offered by the centre at the centre site and at PAWS Community Nursery is of good quality. Children enjoy their activities and are making good progress learning through play. The management team of the centre is in the process of improving the childcare provision at the centre, such as in the crèche. We agree that this will improve opportunities and enjoyment for your children who use this.

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