

Inspection report for Sure Start Preston East Children's Centre

Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	367487
Inspection dates	9 – 10 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Brian Padgett HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Mrs Sandra Simpson
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Brookfield Community Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY372855 The Rainbow Nursery

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 staff and with a broad range of users and providers of services. They met with representatives of the Advisory Board and with a representative of the local authority.

They observed sessions at the centre and at other venues and accompanied outreach workers on visits. They looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Sure Start Preston East Children's Centre serves the Brookfield and Deepdale districts to the north east of the city centre. It is a phase 1 children's centre, first opened on this site in 2006. It provides the full core offer for children's centres. It shares the site with Brookfield Primary School. There is a private provider of childcare and early education, the Rainbow Nursery, which operates within the centre from purpose-built accommodation. The school and nursery are also inspected by Ofsted and their reports are available on the Ofsted website.

Preston East is the main children's centre of a group of four. The centre manager has responsibility for all four centres. Staff are based at Preston East but work across the districts covered by the four centres.

The population of Brookfield is largely White British, whereas Deepdale is more ethnically diverse. Most families in Deepdale are of Indian heritage with significant numbers of Pakistani and Polish backgrounds. Both districts are relatively socially and economically disadvantaged, the majority within the 30% most deprived areas within England with four of the seven wards within the 10% most deprived. There are correspondingly high numbers of families in receipt of benefits and/or where parents and carers are not in work.

The Queen's Lancashire Regiment has its base in Fulwood Barracks and the centre serves military families in conjunction with the Army Welfare Service. The work of the centre is overseen by an Advisory Board. The Board provides governance for all four associated centres. Preston East and Cherry Tree Children's Centre share a Parents' Forum. The forum is represented on the Advisory Board.

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

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Sure Start Preston East is an outstanding children's centre. It is conspicuously successful in meeting the varied needs of its families and their children. The centre provides a warm, family-friendly welcome for parents and children of all backgrounds. Parents and children benefit from the broad and varied range of services provided at the centre and throughout the districts. Arrangements for safeguarding staff, parents and children are excellent, as are arrangements to promote equality, and health and safety. Good quality crèche facilities give peace of mind to parents undertaking courses. These provide children with opportunities to play and mix with other children in a bright and attractive learning environment fully in-line with the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The centre meets the challenges of providing for a community that is ethnically diverse and geographically spread-out exceptionally well. It is successful in bringing services to the community, wherever is best for the people. It has been extremely resourceful in establishing a range of venues across Brookfield and Deepdale and sometimes beyond.

Families and children who are most vulnerable to educational underachievement and/or who are most in need of health and social care are provided for outstandingly well. In particular, for those families with children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities or for those with children on child protection or child-in-need plans, the centre provides the opportunity for life-changing improvement in their circumstances. Inspectors received many individual testimonies of the powerful, positive impact on the lives of parents and carers following intervention from the

centre.

Very good relationships have been established between the centre and its most immediate partners, Brookfield School and Rainbow Nursery. The children's centre teacher works closely with the nursery and is helping raise outcomes for children and the quality of childcare and early education there. This improvement is recognised by the local authority. Many of the children attending the nursery go on to join the school. There are good and improving arrangements between the centre and the school to ensure a smooth transition for children. Two-way communication between school and centre is well developed, so that parents and carers benefit from an extended, coherent service. The creative, joint use of a house on the site, originally built for the site manager, is an excellent example of cooperation between centre and school.

The centre's capacity to work with a very varied range of partners is exceptional. It has the complete confidence of statutory partners, particularly in health and in social care, and exceptional relationships with many partners in the private, voluntary and independent sector, Preston Prison and with The Queen's Lancashire Regiment at Fulwood Barracks. All partners value contact with this centre highly. The consequence for the community is that parents can access an enormously varied range of support and advice, so that seemingly any concern they have for themselves and/or their children may be addressed and resolved.

The quality of care provided by staff at all levels is outstanding. The care and professionalism of staff are the hallmarks of the work of the centre. The team of outreach workers and outreach support workers is exceptionally dedicated and extremely well led and supported by the senior team and coordinators. A high proportion of the outreach staff are 'home-grown' in that they live in the community and/or gained their qualifications through the centre. This makes them an inspiration for the groups of parents accessing services and training. The centre is particularly successful in introducing parents to volunteering and in supporting them through to adult education and employment.

While the positive impact of the work of the centre on children and families was easy to see first-hand, it was less easy to see evidence of data to prove the difference the centre makes. Data collection and analysis are improving. Those indicators examined were positive: the trends for children's achievement and progress, including for the most disadvantaged, are upwards, and social indicators for families are improving. However, procedures to track improvements through data; for example, of children's progress across the Early Years Foundation Stage, are at a relatively early stage of development.

The centre is extremely well led and governance arrangements are very secure. The centre is forward-looking, innovative and very effective, with an outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- With the help of partners, develop the consistent use of assessment across the Early Years Foundation Stage in order to measure and track children's progress and stages of development.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

Outcomes for children and families are outstanding or, where good, are improving strongly.

Data suggests that key indicators for health, social well-being and education are improving faster in the centre's district than in surrounding areas, although those for educational attainment remain below those of England in general.

The health of children and parents and carers attending the centre or supported by outreach shows considerable improvement. Food and exercise are regular themes of services. The centre makes early contact with mothers-to-be and this often leads to their attendance at services throughout pregnancy that ensure their physical and mental health. These are followed up after the birth by a series of well-attended courses promoting children's exercise, bonding, talk and activities such as swimming. Fruit snacks are a feature of crèche and nursery provision. There is good take-up of services on cookery and fathers grow fruit and vegetables each year within the house grounds.

The mental health outcomes for potentially vulnerable families, including those with children with additional needs and those whose children are on child protection plans or who are in public care, are particularly good. Many parents have felt isolated before the intervention of the centre and the consequences of support have been life-transforming for many as they make friends, become more relaxed and their children happier. Through the family liaison officers at Preston Prison, outreach workers engage with prisoners serving sentences to ensure the relationship and links with their children are maintained.

The centre's effectiveness in all issues to do with safeguarding has a considerable impact on families at risk of domestic violence, for example. They become significantly more confident as a result of the strategies they learn from staff. Within venues, rigorous safeguarding, risk assessments and health and safety ensure the well-being of participants.

Enjoyment of courses is high. Parents' evaluations are very positive. The centre clearly understands the connection between children's engagement and happiness and that of their parents, as well as the need for parents to have some time for themselves. Parents believe all these aims are met.

Children in the nursery benefit considerably from the work of the children’s centre teacher. Local authority audits confirm the improvement in outcomes in areas critical to children’s future learning, although levels of development remain below those of most children of this age. Very young children from disadvantaged families have recently benefited from nursery education as part of the government’s two-year-old pilot project.

The many services aimed at supporting children’s learning and development from nought to five years has a significant impact on children’s behaviour and well-being. Whilst all children and families benefit, the most disadvantaged, including those who are the focus of multi-agency intervention, gain most, as do their parents. For a large number of parents and carers, an introduction to the centre is the beginning of a new start and new careers. Many parents, including from potentially vulnerable groups such as young parents and from minority ethnic groups, take up roles as volunteers. They rarely stop there. A high proportion acquires the taste for further education and goes on to college to obtain qualifications and employment. A number of the centre’s staff started at the centre as parents.

Parents and carers are well represented in the consultation and decision-making processes in place to support centre improvement, including the Parents’ Forum and the Advisory Board. Representation fully reflects the range of users and the ethnic diversity of the community.

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
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	1

How good is the provision?

1

The centre has relatively limited accommodation and the districts it covers are geographically spread-out. In order to meet the needs of the community, centre staff set up their services and deliver them in a wide range of venues and in home visits.

They do this exceptionally effectively. The care and professionalism with which they carry out their work are exemplary. They provide powerful role models to the participants of the services. They provide first contact for parents and the key link with professionals in other agencies and organisations. They are highly qualified and very well trained, particularly in safeguarding and in child protection. A high proportion of staff have Early Years Professional Status.

Much of the work of the centre is aimed at supporting potentially vulnerable families. The wide range of services on offer covers needs well. For children’s learning, outreach staff and the children’s centre teacher are highly effective in promoting the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly focusing on children’s personal and emotional development, communication and language, and, more recently, on their knowledge and understanding of the world. Outreach staff are particularly effective when working with potentially vulnerable families. Many times during the inspection, parents from such backgrounds, many have who had experienced acute trauma in their lives, spoke of the profound positive influence of the outreach staff.

The centre staff are very experienced in using a wide range of assessment tools to identify needs. Many of these, such as the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), are shared with other professionals. Some are the centre’s own, such as one for assessing children’s well-being. Centre staff play a critical role within multi-agency team meetings, often as lead professionals. Evaluation of impact is undertaken thoroughly, recently more formally in processing applications for the Child Development Grant and the two year-old nursery place scheme. However, outreach staff are ever vigilant, and network very effectively should they judge a child or family to be at risk.

Much has changed within the nursery since its last inspection and these changes, according to the local authority, have led to significant improvements, such as for provision outdoors. The children’s centre teacher works very closely with the nursery leaders and managers and with the school’s headteacher and reception teacher. The nursery staff are embedding improved practices and the centre and its partners are introducing new tracking arrangements to record children’s progress more effectively. The nursery works in close harmony with the centre, and a number of potentially vulnerable children are accommodated within childcare, including some at short notice.

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	1

meet the needs of users and the wider community	
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?

1

Leaders and managers are extremely effective at all levels. The senior leadership team of centre manager, children’s centre teacher, business support officer and extended services manager is highly qualified and experienced and provides excellent direction for the centre. It works very well with the local authority, the Advisory Board and facilitates very effective communication with partners and users of services. It creates the underpinning ethos of the centre and sets important priorities, notably the promotion of safeguarding for staff, children and parents. The senior team also responsible for the centre’s commitment to inclusion and equality, which can be seen in the excellence of its work with parents and children with additional needs, with minority ethnic groups, fathers, young parents and those families suffering from domestic violence. The centre provides a powerful force for community cohesion in the success of its work across the whole community.

Rigorous self-evaluation is undertaken. Leaders are forward-looking, innovative and have success in attracting resourcing for what they want to accomplish. Governance is excellent. The Advisory Board fields a strong mix of all the partners involved in the centre’s work, including parent representatives from the community. The Board is well-organised, highly skilled and provides support and challenge for the leaders and managers. Users of services are encouraged to feedback on services and leaders and managers are very effective in nurturing parents to play an active role in the Parents’ Forum and on to the Advisory Board.

The leadership team is proud of the work of its outreach team and what they achieve and the outreach team know this. Their care for staff is first-rate. Training and seeking extra qualifications is something centre staff are fully involved in, providing excellent role models for the community.

The centre is exceptionally good at one of the most vital skills for any children’s centre: the capacity to work with partners. The partnerships involved are very wide-ranging, from major public services such as health and social care, to individually commissioned services from the private, voluntary and independent sector. All expressed the rewarding nature and confidence about working with this centre.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	1
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider	1

community	
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
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	1
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	1

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

The local authority provided comparative data about the centre's performance. Before the inspection, inspectors read the Ofsted inspection reports on Brookfield Community Primary School and Rainbow Nursery, in order to read what was written about their partnerships with the centre. Inspectors noted that although the inspection of Brookfield School was recent, that of the nursery took place a considerable time ago and that many changes have occurred since then.

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 Preston East Children's Centre on 9 – 10 February 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

The two of us were impressed as soon as we entered the centre. First, it was very welcoming, even to inspectors! It is very child- and family-friendly. Many of you felt that being made welcome was very important and we agree. Second, we soon

realised that safety, security and your well-being are top of the centre's agenda. Safeguarding was very rigorous. Reception staff are very vigilant on your behalf.

The main job of a children's centre is to get all the services for children and families to work together in your best interests. Preston East does this brilliantly. All the centre's different partners were full of praise for the way in which Sandra Simpson and her team make things happen and make things better. So many services for you and for your children! Whether delivered by outreach staff or by other people, they work. We noticed that when they are aimed at children, like making music or baby massage sessions, you benefit by meeting other parents. When they are aimed at you, the crèche arrangements ensure your children benefit. We fully understood when many of you told us that involvement with the centre had turned your life around.

We looked particularly to see if all the different ethnic groups represented in Deepdale and Brookfield received equal help and support from the centre. We were more than satisfied that all communities have equal opportunities. We were also impressed by how well the centre supported families who were particularly needy, such as those with children with severe medical conditions, or who had suffered domestic violence. The centre has given them real hope for a better future. The staff have not forgotten dads too, and I had a memorable time with a group of them, tasting some of the food they had cooked. It seemed to us that centre staff knew the community really well, many live within it, so they knew, for example, to support service families from the Barracks, if needed.

We talked to the staff and we watched them working. They were inspiring. Developing good relationships counts a great deal and the staff are expert at building trust and making people feel better about themselves and their children. We strongly approved of the numbers of volunteers the centre has developed after attending services at the centre. We were pleased to see how well the centre is working with the school and with Rainbow Nursery to make a seamless service from 0-11 years for children and families a real possibility.

We could see very little wrong in Preston East. Like all our outstanding centres, they are never satisfied and always want to get better. Behind the scenes, we asked the centre to build up more accurate data to help check, for example, on children's progress. The staff are already working on this.

If you were one of the parents or carers we talked to, thank you for your help.

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