

Inspection report for Brookvale Children's Centre

Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	366080
Inspection dates	9-10 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Gill Jones HMI

Centre governance	Local Authority
Centre leader	Claire Hunter
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not Applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Brookvale Nursery EY 280215

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 registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with representatives of the centre's advisory board, partnership agencies, the local authority, members of staff and users of the centre.

They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Brookvale Children's Centre started as a Sure Start Local Programme. It is situated in the refurbished Infant School building next to Brookvale Primary School. It is a phase 1 centre and provides the full core offer of integrated childcare and family learning, health services, family support, outreach work and financial and employment advice from Jobcentre Plus. The centre leader manages another local phase 1 children's centre, Windmill Hill. Brookvale staff are employed to work out of both centres. No additional staff are employed to work out of Windmill Hill. The joint advisory board covers four local children's centres in Halton.

The centre serves an area which experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage. Express ways linking Runcorn with the local motorway system divide local communities. More families who live in this reach area are unemployed than is found locally and nationally. The percentage of families claiming benefits is above the national average and above the average for Halton. The proportion of children in the local area achieving 78 points and above at the end of the Early Years

Foundation Stage is well below average. A very small proportion of families are from ethnic minority backgrounds.

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

Children and families who use Brookvale appreciate the good level of care, guidance and support they receive from staff and other professionals who work at the centre. Parents describe it as a 'Godsend' and say they feel safe at the centre, both physically and emotionally. The geography of the immediate locality divides the community physically, but increasingly, centre outreach work and activities are drawing families into the centre, enabling them to meet and make friends. Vulnerable parents in particular say this is increasing their resilience and ability to cope with life. A support group started and run by parents, 'Time4us', meets regularly in the café, which is a busy hub of the centre. This group is active in supporting and challenging the leadership to design provision to meet the needs of the community. Some members of this group told inspectors how the centre had helped them to 'turn their life around' and they are passionate to ensure the centre reaches out to families, particularly to those who traditionally may be reluctant to engage with services. They spoke about the isolation many lone parents feel and how the centre 'breaks down barriers by not judging but helping'.

A real strength of the centre is the partnership work with Jobcentre Plus and adult learning. Their regular presence at the centre, together with bespoke support from highly skilled employment advisors and tutors, means that parents are gaining skills and qualifications which are improving the life chances of their families. Good quality crèche facilities provide children with a positive start to their education while their parents study. 'Skills for life' literacy and numeracy courses are popular. The children who attend the day-care nursery enjoy their education. Although many children start with levels of skills, knowledge and understanding well below that found nationally, they are achieving well, particularly in their speech and language development. Data shows the most disadvantaged five-year-olds in the reach area are starting to catch up with their peers. Children and families attending the centre are making good

progress towards achieving future economic well-being.

Safeguarding the health, safety and well-being of children and families in the reach area is a high priority at the centre. There are clear policies and procedures which all staff apply consistently well and the route for referral is clear. The local authority has recently reorganised its services providing care around the family. The new integrated working support team (IWST) manage and analyse referrals centrally. Local agencies report that this new partnership working to support the most vulnerable families is easier because of increased clarity in the referral process and central monitoring of impact. Regular information-sharing meetings take place between partner agencies, resulting in programmes of help closely tailored to meet families' needs. Centre staff and their partners from other agencies know the families within the reach area well and target their work appropriately. This includes directing users to groups at other centres, such as teenage mothers and young carers. However, the centre's use of data is still at a relatively early stage of development. This is partly because the information available to the centre about the outcomes in the reach area was, until very recently, poor. Although the centre clearly targets its work to meet local priorities, it is not yet at the stage where it is using data to determine exactly the impact of its work on families in the reach area.

The centre works with health partners to provide ante-natal care from the centre. This introduces many prospective users to the centre's services and the centre capitalises on this well by building good relationships with users early on. However, baby clinics are in the health clinics and, although the centre's community development worker attends these regularly, some activities, such as promoting breastfeeding and smoking cessation are not strengths of the centre's work. Promoting these aspects is a high priority locally, but the centre does not have data to show the impact of any work undertaken on breastfeeding or smoking cessation in the reach area. The centre recognises the need to extend this aspect of their work.

The centre leader is determined to provide high quality services for the reach area and staff support her well in realising this ambition. Clear lines of supervision by the local authority are in place and this, together with the vision of the centre leader is driving improvements in the centre's work. However, the relatively new advisory board currently serves four children's centres. Although it has secured support from all the relevant partners, it does not meet statutory requirements because its plans and actions are not sufficiently bespoke to the centre. Staff make regular evaluations of the activities provided, taking good account of user views. This, together with the parents' forum, influences future provision and is a strong aspect of the centre's work. In promoting strong partnership arrangements and developing the centre's activities to suit the needs of users, alongside meeting the priorities of the local authority, the centre is demonstrating good capacity to make further improvements.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure the advisory board meets statutory requirements by increasing its function so that it provides bespoke direction and challenge to Brookvale.
- Improve the quality of self-evaluation by measuring the success of the centre's plans for improvement more closely against the outcomes for children and families in the reach area, particularly with regard to improving health outcomes.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

'Trust, care and respect' are words that parents and carers use frequently to explain their strong relationships with centre staff. Users feel safe at the centre, though some explained how difficult it was for them to take the initial step, needing one-to-one support from centre staff. Groups such as 'Confident you' increase users' self-esteem and lessen frustration. As one parent told inspectors 'Without this place, my head would be black and blue from hitting the wall'. Holistic therapies and individual counselling sessions are supporting users' emotional health effectively. Parenting courses provided by extended schools are helping those families facing challenging circumstances, to improve their safety and emotional health. In addition, Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) training and first aid courses are increasing users understanding of dangers in the environment. The centre uses 'team around the family' support for users to help find suitable housing and benefits and the centre works closely in partnership with agencies to target help to victims of abuse. The centre works closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau and users appreciate the guidance to help them out of poverty and to avoid debt.

Lone parents receive good support through the partnership with Jobcentre Plus. Lone parent interviews held weekly at the centre enable the advisor to direct customers to the adult learning tutor and the community development worker. This is reducing the non-attendance rate at interviews significantly. Lone parents appreciate the guidance they receive. Modular qualifications, which include courses such as 'Keeping your child healthy and safe' are developing users' understanding of providing healthy meals on a budget well. Users clearly benefit from these courses which are enabling them to become more confident parents. A high percentage of users gain accredited qualifications through the centre. The centre is successful in moving vulnerable families out of unemployment through to education, training and into work.

Children make good progress in their learning and development in relation to their starting points and capabilities. Nursery staff benefit from the input of the children's centre qualified teacher. Speech and language therapy and courses, such as 'You make the difference' are enabling parents to support their children's language development well. Activities, such as 'Movers and shakers' and 'Sticky fingers', are

enabling parents and carers to develop a good understanding of children's learning and development. Grandparents are active in the centre and appreciate the opportunities they have to learn from the group activities, including the 'Grandparents group'. The centre is targeting all generations to aspire towards securing economic well-being for their families.

The crèche and nursery promote healthy lifestyles well. Children have regular access to excellent outdoor facilities and good routines to ensure they benefit from fresh air and physical exercise. Groups, such as 'Mini movers, baby groovers,' are ensuring parents gain a good understanding of the importance of developing children's physical skills from early on. However, although the centre is keen to promote health among users, high obesity rates for under fives living in the reach area demonstrate the centre's impact is not yet making enough difference overall. In addition, the centre is not gathering sufficient information to know how successfully its promotion of breastfeeding and smoking cessation is making a difference to actual rates.

An active parent group participates in decision making and contributes well to the life of the centre. They are increasing their profile in the centre and are beginning to find ways to ensure that a wide range of parents and carers have a voice in future provision. Parents sit on the advisory board. However, because this is relatively new, the function of the board and their role on it is not entirely clear to 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	3
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	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 new integrated working support team (IWST) supports Brookvale well to identify the children and families most in need. Strong partnership work between agencies, good local knowledge and use of the Common Assessment Framework ensures that centre workers are delegating resources well to those most in need. Support for lone parents is particularly good, especially for fathers where there was a 100% success rate for gaining qualifications.

The well-run crèche and nursery provides good care, education and play opportunities which encourage users to access services and activities at the centre. Celebration of success is a regular feature in the centre's diary, with adults receiving rewards for accredited and non-accredited programmes. Displays of adult and children's work are prominent features in the centre. Parents appreciate the opportunities to learn about the Early Years Foundation Stage and how they can help their child to develop. A strength of the centre's work is the focus on planning educational impact in the activities provided. Although some of these plans are lengthy, they demonstrate clearly the emphasis centre staff place on ensuring good quality learning is the focus of all groups.

Centre staff evaluate activities regularly and respond to user needs well. Where numbers of users drop, staff change the times of activities or replace them. However, the use of data to determine provision is at a relatively early stage of development. This means that some priority key indicators locally, such as breastfeeding, obesity and smoking cessation do not have a strong enough focus in the centre's provision. In addition, although support for individual families in need is targeted appropriately, the work of the centre is not publicised well enough to ensure that new users are aware of what is available.

Users speak highly of the centre and the difference it has made to their lives. Many explained how without the care and support they've received they 'would go under'. Centre staff are intuitive in their dealings with parents and carers and judge the level of support required well. Staff are clear in their aim to enable parents and carers to be independent. They regard success as 'a user who no longer needs us'. In return, users who have taken that step are keen to repay the centre for the support. Unfortunately, slow action by Halton Borough Council in completing its policy for volunteering, is preventing those who want to step up as volunteers from doing so.

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	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre leader, well supported by her staff, has developed the centre so that outcomes for users are now mainly good. This means the centre is providing good

value for money. The centre leader is ambitious to continue to improve opportunities for children and families in the reach area. Staff expectations are high. Strong partnership work between adult learning, Jobcentre Plus and the nursery in particular, is improving the lives of some of the most vulnerable families in the reach area. The centre is promoting equality of opportunity and diversity well. Policies, procedures and observations during the inspection demonstrate that it is an inclusive environment. Relationships are respectful and people say they feel valued.

Safeguarding procedures meet current requirements and staff know with whom and where to share concerns. Information about how to protect vulnerable adults and children from harm are visible in all rooms. In addition, useful information about domestic violence and sexual health are on display around the centre. Recruitment procedures are robust and the supervision of staff by the centre leader includes regular safeguarding updates and checks. The recent formation of IWSST supports centre staff actions very effectively. Information sharing is appropriate and timely, both between staff and with partner agencies. As a result, the centre safeguards families' emotional health and well-being successfully and the risk of harm to children is reduced.

The local authority is keen to align the services within its children's centres. As part of this, the centre leader manages two centres, which share one staff team who work on both sites. The staff team is well led and managed and the lines of accountability are clearly understood. The centre works closely with two other children's centres in Runcorn and the four centres share one advisory board, set up in May 2010. This relatively new arrangement is not serving Brookvale well. Currently, the advisory board is not sufficiently focused on the issues facing Brookvale and members of the board are not entirely clear about their role. Balancing this, the direction from the local authority in its supervision arrangements of the centre is leading to improving provision and outcomes for users. For example, since September, the quality of data available to the centre has improved considerably and the centre leader is now using this data to inform provision. However, some data on the reach area is still missing so it remains difficult for the centre to measure its impact against all the local indicators. The centre manages resources efficiently and an active parents' forum plays an integral part in gathering community views and shaping the life of the centre.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	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	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
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 children's centre inspection findings were informed by a parallel inspection of the separately managed Brookvale Nursery on 10 February 2011. The full inspection report for this event can be found on the Ofsted website.

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 Brookvale Children's Centre on 9 and 10 February 2011. We judged the centre as good.

Thank you to those of you who met with inspectors. You told us about the difference the centre is making to your lives and how it enables you to deal with the difficulties some of you face daily. It is clear that you appreciate the efforts the centre staff make to support you and that you are learning how to manage your families better as a result. Inspectors agree with you. The centre is a 'great place'.

You told us that you feel safe at the centre. It is attractive and well cared for and you enjoy the café and the opportunity to talk to centre staff. Some of you said that at the centre you can relax because 'no one is judging you'. You explained that this makes the children's centre different from other services because it helps you to

'grow as a person'. Taking a course like 'Confident you' is the first step many of you take towards improving your life.

One of the strengths of the centre is the way it works closely with partner agencies to provide good support and advice. For example, we found that Jobcentre Plus, adult learning and the Citizens Advice Bureau work very well together to help lone parents. Many of you gain qualifications, find employment and appreciate the financial advice. The centre also displays your work and achievements, to celebrate your success. A group of grandmothers meet regularly to help their grandchildren to play and learn. All the groups we met told us how staff encourage them and help them to develop new skills. You trust the staff and share your concerns, knowing that they will direct you to the advice and support you need.

Children who attend the centre get a good start to their education. The staff plan activities carefully to meet their needs and abilities well. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities are provided for well. The nursery and crèche have all the areas of learning young children need to develop skills, knowledge and understanding. The outdoor area is particularly attractive and popular, even in the rain!

Most of the outcomes for users of the centre are good. However, the outcome for health is only satisfactory. This is because the centre is less successful in promoting and securing high rates of breastfeeding and smoking cessation. An important aspect of its work is to secure the health and well-being of the next generation of children. Although the centre promotes healthy lifestyles well, the levels of childhood obesity are very high in Runcorn. Because of this we have asked the centre to focus more closely on improving the health outcomes for children and their families.

The centre is well led and managed. Centre staff listen to your views and the parents forum and Time4us group influences the activities on offer at the centre. However, at the moment the centre shares an advisory board with three other local children's centres. This is not working well for Brookvale and we have asked the centre to improve this aspect of its work.

One user told inspectors how for her it was 'difficult to cross the threshold, but once she did, it made all the difference'. It is clear to inspectors that the centre is having a positive influence on the lives of many young children and families in the locality.

Thank you again for talking to us and sharing your views.

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