

Inspection report for Featherstone Children's Centre and Nursery School

Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	367269
Inspection dates	8–9 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Joy Law HMI

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Linked school if applicable	Featherstone Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	N/A

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.

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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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the local authority, centre staff, partner agencies, parents and carers. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's self-evaluation form, data provided by the local authority and the centre, documents and policies, and minutes of meetings of the governing body's sub-committee.

Information about the centre

Featherstone Children's Centre is located north of Birmingham city centre. The purpose-built centre was designated as a phase one children's centre in 2007. The area is served by a number of local amenities such as a newly-built health centre, a high street with a good range of shops, swimming baths and a local library. The ward is classed as being in the top 10–20% most deprived wards in England. Data for new births indicate that the ethnic mix of the reach is changing over time with White British remaining as the predominant group (36%). The remainder of the population are from a range of minority ethnic backgrounds.

The centre provides the full core offer of a range of integrated services that include health, family support, adult training, and early years advice and guidance. Centre services are delivered from the children's centre and through off-site outreach work. There is presently no on-site day-care provision. Out-of-hours provision is available for the children attending the on-site nursery school. Crèche facilities are also provided for those attending centre activities. The skills and knowledge with which children enter the on-site nursery school are below those expected nationally for their age.

The centre is governed by the governing body for the nursery school. The governing body has designated full powers of decision making to a sub-committee which operates in place of an advisory board. The sub-committee is responsible for

overseeing the day-to-day running of the centre and its strategic development. It includes representatives of the local authority, staff, parents and carers.

Within the community served by the children’s centre, there are eleven super-output areas including three which are shared with other children’s centres. There are 1152 children aged under five years in the reach area. Twenty-one percent of children aged under five years are living in workless households receiving benefits. Forty six percent of families are lone-parent families with dependants aged under 16 years.

The centre is developing working partnerships with another children’s centre locally to deliver integrated work within the community. Throughout the coming year, the centre plans to build further links with the local cluster of children’s centres. It has established working relationships with other professional services to deliver a universal programme to meet the local community’s needs.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Featherstone Children’s Centre is a satisfactory centre. It is rapidly improving and a number of its features are good. Care, guidance and support are particular strengths as a result of the strong leadership, highly effective team-working and good partnerships with the commissioned services. However, partnerships with health services and some agencies are less strong. Although now improving, the lack of data, and support and guidance at strategic level, from the local authority has meant that, until very recently, the centre has been less effective in developing its services.

Managers set ambitious targets to improve the health, safety and economic well-being of the local community. These, together with effective family support ensure that families, whose circumstances have made them vulnerable and disadvantaged, benefit from a range of services that are carefully tailored to meet their particular needs.

Outcomes for children and their families are good. Users say that they feel safe and well cared for at the centre and speak very highly of the support and encouragement

they receive from all staff. Provision to help children learn and develop is good, preparing them well for the future. Children who attend the centre's 'Stay and Play' sessions and crèche facilities benefit particularly from focused support and a good range of play opportunities that help develop their communication and social skills.

Provision to enable parents and carers to learn new skills to support their children's learning and development is strong. The opportunities for adult users to develop their skills and qualifications in order to improve employment prospects are satisfactory and improving. This is a result of the centre looking at innovative ways to deliver training. For example, a course on information and communication technology has already been planned through partnership working with another children's centre.

The Family Support Team work effectively to meet the needs of vulnerable families. Users speak very positively about the impact of this work on their lives. Typical comments include, 'It has made me a better person and a better mother' and 'I would not be here now without the intervention and support I received.' The children's centre is actively promoting the inclusion of all children and their families. However, there are still known gaps within the community that have not been reached.

The centre has good arrangements for safeguarding all users and is rightly recognised as a place of safety. The Common Assessment Framework is used well and the centre has a good record of improving the safety of children subject to a child protection plan.

The centre has a good understanding of its strengths and areas for further development. New baseline assessments and monitoring systems have been introduced and are beginning to show the impact the setting has on its users. However, there are limited opportunities at the present time for all members of the community and partner agencies to be actively involved in the governance of the centre. Consequently, they are unable to fully contribute their views, evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the setting and to influence decision making.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority to develop partnerships with health services and other agencies to improve access to services for users.
- Make better use of data available from the local authority to plan effectively and implement targeted support.
- Increase opportunities for users and partner agencies to be actively involved in the governance of the centre, enabling them to contribute their views, evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the setting and to influence decision making.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Health and well-being of families are improving. Parents, carers and children are developing an awareness of adopting healthy lifestyles. They access healthy cooking sessions where they learn about healthy eating and enjoy eating fruit from across the world on 'Fruity Fridays'. The centre supports parents and carers with physical and emotional difficulties well. Preventative work on issues relating to domestic violence, drug and alcohol misuse is limited. Parents and carers talk confidently about how their health and well-being have improved and how this has helped their parenting skills. Baby massage classes are well-attended programmes. Parents and carers talk confidently about how these sessions have enabled them to help their babies and children sleep.

Children and users feel safe at the centre. The trained Family Support Worker provides parents and carers with detailed information on how to create and maintain a safe environment for young children. The centre, in collaboration with partner agencies, is very effective in identifying and responding to the safeguarding needs of children and their families. The use of the Common Assessment Framework for recording and coordinating support programmes is good. Children with child protection plans are well supported. Case studies illustrate how effective family support workers are in helping parents and carers to become more confident and successful in managing their family lives.

The Early Years Foundation Stage profile data show that key outcomes in children's personal, social and emotional development, and their communication, language and literacy have continued to improve over the last three years. Opportunities for parents, carers and children to play and learn together develop the parents' and carers' capacity to support their children's learning and development well. Holiday activities are increasingly successful and enjoyed by users and have resulted in a significant increase in uptake.

Parents and carers have some good opportunities to share their views with the centre. For example, floor books containing an excellent range of photographs of children and families engaged in activities. These books are used well to encourage users to record their comments.

Staff provide good role models that successfully support children's positive behaviour. A culture of respect is evident throughout the centre. Childminders, parents and carers comment on how children's behaviour has improved since attending the provision. They observe their children interacting very positively with other children, developing relationships as they learn to share and play together.

Parents and carers say they feel 'included' and comment on the difference that the centre has made to their confidence and ability to improve their family's lives. Parents talk passionately about how the staff support them through difficult times and say that without help from the children's centre, their lives would be very different.

The centre successfully helps promote families' economic stability, for example, by supporting children to develop skills for the future and helping families to secure benefits and housing. To supplement the training available locally, the centre is working with another children's centre to secure courses to support unemployed adults back into work. Although provision in this area is at a relatively early stage of development, users have responded particularly well and some are already moving on to further education and employment.

Parents, carers and stakeholders are beginning to contribute to decision making. They are able to communicate their views through regular evaluation processes which contribute to the development of services. However, their involvement in evaluating the services and action planning is limited. Translators are used effectively when required to support user's engagement, but the lack of written information to support families who speak English as an additional language inhibits their ability to contribute their views.

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	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

3

User engagement has successfully increased since the centre opened, with good attendance across all minority ethnic groups. The centre demonstrates good knowledge of most families using its services and tailors these to meet their needs. However, it is also fully aware that there is still some way to go to access all families and to encourage wider community involvement with the services. Engagement with particular groups, such as those with disabilities or from White European heritage, is limited.

The use of the Common Assessment Framework is securely embedded. All family support workers are involved in assessing the complex needs of families who may be vulnerable due to their circumstances. They work effectively with families directly or engage the appropriate services to meet their specific needs. Effective support is provided through services when needs are identified. For example, the centre

commissions and works effectively with partners such as Home Start, Malachi Trust and Merlin Jets. Case studies confirm how parents and carers suffering from domestic violence and post-natal depression have been extremely well supported. One user acknowledged that they would not be here today if it had not been for the support and care from the children’s centre. However, staff are less proactive in implementing preventative strategies for domestic violence, alcohol and substance misuse.

The centre has worked well in reaching and supporting lone parents, resulting in an increased number successfully accessing services and improving outcomes for themselves and their families. In the past year, the centre has commissioned a male worker to support fathers. Although engagement is steadily increasing, and fathers talk confidently and positively about the effect the centre has had on their families, there are insufficient strategies in place to engage more fathers in a wider range of opportunities.

The provision to help children learn and develop is good. The centre promotes some purposeful learning for parents, carers and childminders, such as ‘Stay and Play’ sessions, which enable them to support children’s development. These sessions are successful and, as a result of demand, sessions have been increased from two to four each week. However, the centre’s knowledge of users’ specific needs is variable and the needs of all groups of users are not equally well met. Courses to support adults to gain employment are not designed as well as those to develop their parenting skills. Consequently, this aspect of provision is satisfactory overall. The centre has recently introduced baseline assessments for adults in order to plan services more effectively.

Transition arrangements for children moving on to early years settings and schools are good. Baseline assessments and ongoing assessments are now undertaken of all children attending ‘Stay and Play’ sessions which enable children’s learning and development to be effectively promoted and early intervention strategies implemented, such as speech and language therapy.

Users are well informed about how to access childcare, benefits, and housing. They are beginning to contribute to decision making, leading to improvement in their personal development for some individuals.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
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
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How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management are good, with particular strengths in relation to safeguarding and the recruitment and selection of good quality staff. The senior leadership team has a clear vision for the centre and consistently communicates high expectations to staff, who are committed and enthusiastic. Accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood by all the team. The centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Governance arrangements are now in place and led by knowledgeable and effective leaders. However, the lack of involvement and support at strategic level from the local authority in providing data and the withdrawal of health services has slowed the centre's ability to develop services. Clear acknowledgement from the centre's leaders confirms that not enough is being done to engage all stakeholders in self evaluation and improvement work.

Staff feel valued, and managers respect the contribution each makes to improving life chances of users. Consequently, the effective work of the centre has created a safe, friendly environment where there are high expectations of its users and there is equality for all. The quality of care and support offered to families in times of crisis is good. The Family Support Team works effectively to meet the needs of families who are vulnerable because of their circumstances, including those who are referred to the centre and through self-referral. The links with Malachi Trust ensure that those families in need of one-to-one specialist counselling are able to access support quickly and effectively.

Clear and robust procedures to safeguard and promote all users, particularly the most vulnerable, are in place and understood by all. All the required documentation is in place and of good quality. Staff are aware of key safeguarding policies and are vigilant in identifying and responding to any potential risks that users may encounter. The vetting of staff is secure, and they are well trained. Risk assessments are consistently undertaken well when family support workers do home visits.

Clear procedures and protocols with social care and health are resulting in increasing numbers of children either on the child protection register or with a family plan being referred to the centre. Good partnership arrangements ensure that children and families at risk or in need are prioritised and effectively supported with positive outcomes. Users' comments confirm how the children's centre has successfully supported a parent in gaining full care responsibility of her children who had previously been taken into care. Close links with the on-site childminder network coordinator ensures that the most vulnerable parents, carers and children receive appropriate respite care.

The purpose-built children's centre is of very good quality, welcoming, safe and

maintained to a high standard. Most resources are generally well aligned to users' needs. However, limited innovation and creativity occasionally restricts users' abilities to access the centre and outreach services, particularly for fathers. The centre successfully supported all families in finding alternative childcare as a result of the on-site childcare provision being closed in October 2010 due to the provider withdrawing their service. Although the centre has identified a provider to run the provision, this is on hold while a sufficiency review is currently being undertaken, as requested by the local authority. This has meant that the childcare facilities have remained unused and a waste of resources.

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	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
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	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	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	3

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

There is no on-site early years provision currently operating. The previous provider at Featherstone Children's Centre was inspected on 15 May 2008 and the quality of care was judged to be good and the quality of nursery education was judged to be satisfactory. The on-site Featherstone Nursery School was inspected on the 13-14 July 2010 and was judged to be good.

The full report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Featherstone Children's Centre on 8–9 March 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall. We talked with some of you, your children, staff, and a wide range of partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents.

The centre manager and her dedicated team have provided families with a varied range of services that are carefully tailored to meet your particular needs. Those of you who spoke with us said that you feel the centre is supportive and staff are kind and caring, and give you good advice. Most importantly, you said it helps improve your lives, particularly for those of you who are facing difficult challenges. Your children's centre staff team meet regularly to discuss the centre's work and to plan for improvement. All staff place importance on you and your families and provide a listening ear for you. They are keen to create a warm and welcoming environment where you feel at home and are able to talk freely about things that matter to you or are causing you concern. As a result, you value the centre and use the services regularly.

Staff listen to what you have to say about the centre and what you need. However, parents, users and agencies are not yet fully involved in making the important decisions about the provision of services. The centre offers a satisfactory range of services and activities which are led by skilled and dedicated professionals.

Those of you who use the centre are now much more able to stay safe and healthy and to provide for your families. Staff provide you with access to training and home visits and give advice on how you can prevent accidents in and around your home to keep your children safe. They are helping you to keep yourselves and your children healthy by encouraging you to prepare and provide healthy and nutritious meals.

The parents and carers we spoke with are particularly proud of their achievements, in particular becoming better parents and carers because of the skills they learnt at the centre. The children who use the centre are also well catered for. This means that they settle well into the local nurseries and make good progress in their learning and development because they have benefited from the centre's services. The staff at the centre encourage you to engage in play with your children from a very early age at sessions such as 'Stay and Play'. You told us how much you and your children enjoy the activities you access at the centre and the positive effect these are having on you and your families.

To develop further the work of the centre, we have asked the senior leadership team and local authority to work together to improve partnerships with health services and

other agencies. This will enable you to have more access to health services at the centre, and enable leaders to obtain accurate data in order to plan and implement targeted support to meet your needs. We have also asked them to increase opportunities for you and partner agencies to be actively involved in the centre's governance, so that you are able to provide your views, evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of the setting and to influence decision making.

We would like to thank everyone who came to speak to us. It was a privilege to be able to talk to you. Your honest and open discussions with us helped us immensely during the inspection. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time at your centre, and we wish you and your families the best for the future.

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