

Inspection report for Gildersome and Drighlington Children's Centre

Local authority	Leeds
Inspection number	365782
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Helen Groves

Centre governance	Gildersome Primary School
Centre leader	Bernard McMahon
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Gildersome Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY 332346 Gildersome Koosh Club

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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents and carers, staff, the school's headteacher, partners and representatives of the local authority linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work and also looked at a range of documentation including the centre's operational plans, evaluations, and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Gildersome and Drighlington Children's Centre serves a relatively small geographical area across two very distinct communities set in a semi-rural area on the outskirts of Leeds. The communities contain areas that are significantly disadvantaged, sitting alongside contrasting areas of affluence. The centre was opened in 2009 and is situated on the site of Gildersome Primary School, which is responsible for leadership and financial accountability. An additional satellite site in Drighlington is approximately a quarter of a mile away from the main site. Access to public transport is limited especially during the evenings and weekends. Most families are of White British heritage, although there is an increasing range of ethnic diversity in the locality. There is a mixture of private and social housing. Employment figures are in line with the national average, but unemployment rates are rising as a result of the economic downturn in the area. On entry to the centre, most children have the expected skills for their age.

The range of integrated services for children and their families offered by the centre is supplemented by specialist services provided by external partners such as health, counselling, information, advice and guidance. There is no childcare provision available on either site. The majority of services are delivered from the Gildersome site and a local cluster arrangement with three neighbouring centres allows some sharing of resources and facilities. The centre manager is currently absent and an

acting manager has assumed temporary responsibility. Two other members of staff are on long-term leave.

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

3

Main findings

Gildersome and Drighlington Children's Centre provides a satisfactory quality of education and care to children and families, with all five of the Every Child Matters outcomes judged to be satisfactory or better. Relationships with families are good and the centre rightly prides itself on the warm welcome it extends to all. Users speak very positively about the services provided by the centre and their experience of support offered. One user said, 'Despite my being nervous about entering the centre, they have made a massive difference and changed my life'. The centre makes a good contribution to the safety and well-being of its users. Safeguarding arrangements are fully understood by all members of staff. While the centre promotes healthy lifestyles satisfactorily, opportunities to reinforce this work with children, parents and carers in relation to healthy eating are sometimes missed.

The centre has developed close and productive working partnerships with a good range of service providers. Protocols for making referrals and sharing information between relevant agencies working within and outside the centre are generally effective, although not always followed up to determine the quality of service received.

Parents' and carers' views are actively sought and a wide range of case study evidence indicates that the centre is very responsive to the needs of those who use it. The centre is very good at identifying the needs of vulnerable families and creating highly individualised support plans. Extensive outreach work has historically been a key feature of the centre but only a basic level of this work is being carried out at the present time due to staffing difficulties.

Very strong teamwork is helping the centre through a difficult phase of its development. Additional resources provided by the local authority and school have also helped it to maintain its current range of satisfactory provision with some good features, but some development work has been curtailed due to changes in staffing. Arrangements for governance and accountability are undergoing significant changes

to increase the level of parental involvement, but plans relating to this and to develop more formal links with school management have not yet been fully implemented.

The centre's self-evaluation is mainly accurate, although the use of data and targets to inform management decisions is not sufficiently developed. This limits the centre's ability to rigorously assess the impact of its work and that of its partner agencies. However, satisfactory and sometimes good outcomes for users, sound provision and considerable strengths in teamwork demonstrate the centre has satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Implement plans for more formal links with school management and improve structures for parents and carers to contribute to governance and the accountability of the centre.
- Establish systems to rigorously assess data and the impact of services provided by the centre and all partner agencies to inform planning, target-setting and decision making.
- Re-establish the high profile previously given to outreach work in defining and developing the range of services provided by the centre.
- Actively reinforce options for healthy eating in all activities for both children and adults.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

Parents and carers report that they are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their children healthy. However, some group sessions actively encourage healthy eating for children but parents and carers do not always reinforce this by their own actions and choices. Individual case study evidence and some individual user evaluation feedback sheets from courses and services provided directly by the centre are extremely positive. These indicate that the centre is having a constructive impact on individual children and their families who take advantage of services offered. A significant strength of the centre is the way in which it supports the emotional well-being of children and adults, especially when they are experiencing difficult times. Several parents and carers report that the centre is very quick to respond to their specific needs.

The centre makes a good contribution to the safety and well-being of its users with the safety of parents, carers and children using facilities or attending activities given a high priority. Monitoring of access to the centre is vigorously enforced by all staff, and parents and carers feel it is a safe environment for them and their children.

The extent to which users make progress educationally and in their personal development is satisfactory overall. Children attending group activities develop positive behaviour, and the managing school reports that on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage, children who have attended the centre are satisfactorily prepared for more formal education, especially in their personal and emotional development.

The impact of recent staffing shortages has led to a reduction in the family outreach work. The centre is aware, as a result, that there are some members of the community it now does not reach. Parents and carers who use the centre said that they really enjoyed the 'stay and play' sessions. They are well organised and the leader makes activities stimulating and fun for children and adults. Many of the parents and carers who spoke with inspectors said they felt the centre was very welcoming and supportive. Despite lacking in self-confidence at first, several stated that the approachable nature of centre staff enabled them to access services confidently. Attendance at the centre is helping new mothers overcome feelings of isolation and the programme to support mothers with postnatal depression is highly effective.

Inspectors spoke to a small number of parents and carers who have formed groups within the centre and continue to support each other at home and within their community groups. Two of these have progressed to becoming volunteers at parent and toddler group sessions and provide support for the outreach worker. However, access to further learning opportunities and advice that may increase adults' chances to progress into employment or training are limited.

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	3
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	3

How good is the provision?

3

The range of the provision offered by the centre is satisfactory. The small number of centre staff is effectively supplemented by specialist staff from other agencies such as health, counselling and Jobcentre Plus. Scheduling of activities makes very flexible use of accommodation and resources within this very small centre. Families with children aged nought to five are well supported by a wide range of services. Assessment of individual cases is sound, especially for vulnerable children and families referred to the centre in times of crisis. The staff team focus clearly on tailoring support plans to meet individual needs of families and individuals especially at times of crisis. The centre is heavily reliant on effective signposting to other providers for many of the specialist services required. Partnership arrangements are effective and channels of communication clear.

Centre users are offered opportunities for genuine consultation and to give honest feedback on activities that have taken place, although formal analysis of this information does not always take place. The impact of recent staffing difficulties has led to a reduction in the range of services available during holidays and several parents stated this was regrettable. The extent to which the scope of services, activities and opportunities meets the needs of users in the wider community is not routinely measured and cannot be evaluated accurately by the centre.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Everyone interviewed by inspectors stated that the key feature of this centre is how it provides a very welcoming and supportive environment, with approachable staff demonstrating a very inclusive ethos. Once parents and carers are engaged they tend to maintain good contact and use of the centre. However, the quality of information and guidance for parents and carers seeking training and work is very variable. Access to vocational training and support for numeracy and literacy is limited to referral outside the centre. Links to education and training providers are informal and not always effective in supporting adults to overcome their barriers to learning.

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	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

A strong team ethos has carried the centre through a very difficult phase of its development, although the implementation of some initiatives and plans has had to be delayed. All staff are well motivated to seek further improvement and are sustaining outcomes to at least satisfactory levels. Additional resources provided by the local authority and school have also helped the centre to maintain its current range of essential work. Accountability and governance structures are widely recognised as key areas for development but these have not yet been systematically addressed by the school or centre management. Parents and carers are keen to make use of the new systems for shaping and influencing the running of the centre, but arrangements for enabling them to do so are not yet in place. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate and enables managers to know the centre's main strengths and areas for improvement but it is not sufficiently sharp in measuring and evaluating performance.

The centre is very good at demonstrating the qualitative difference it has made to individual children and families through a wide range of relevant case studies but it is not so strong in showing the impact quantitatively through systematic analysis of data and comparison to national performance indicators. The advisory board, while fully supportive of the centre's work, does not provide a sufficiently robust level of challenge to its management.

There is evidence of effective joint working across the locality to maximise resource efficiency. Centres across the area share facilities, staff training and peer support arrangements. Flexible use is made of the limited accommodation available but this can create difficulties for some centre users. Baby massage and yoga classes are delivered in the reception area where staff and visitors are entering the building, causing some disruption to such sessions.

Different sections of the community are actively encouraged to mix and work together. Grandparents participate in and enjoy activities with younger parents and children. Some focused work has been started to involve fathers in the centre but it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of this initiative. A specialist support group for parents and carers of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities was created in response to local need but low attendance at sessions has led to closure.

Clear procedures are in place for reporting child protection issues and staff have a good awareness of the importance of safeguarding and the extent of their responsibilities. Training is regularly updated and exceeds the minimum requirements.

Some effective partnership working with the Morley Children's Services cluster has extended the range of services offered to the wider community. The partnership structure is well supported by a wide range of service providers including police,

youth service, health, schools and social care helping to raise the profile of the work carried out in the children’s centres. Some historical difficulties with information sharing are starting to be addressed. Lack of key information, such as the number of newborn infants, and obesity figures, have made identification of families who may need support more difficult. Some agencies such as adult learning and Jobcentre Plus have only limited provision in the centre and the impact of this work is not routinely monitored to evaluate the impact on users. Cost effectiveness and value for money provided by the centre is satisfactory.

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	3
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	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	3
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

Reports of visits by the local authority were analysed.

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copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Summary for centre users

We inspected the Gildersome and Drighlington Children's Centre on 9 and 10 March 2011. We talked with parents and carers, staff, partners and members of the local authority linked to the centre. We observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documents. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We understand the centre has been experiencing some difficulties through staff shortages but we know that the staff have worked very hard to maintain the level of service they provide. However, the important work of visiting and making contact with families has been reduced and we agree with the centre that this needs to be increased again as soon as possible.

Although the centre is very small, staff and partners make flexible use of the space and equipment available. We found that the centre makes you feel welcome and takes good care to give you their support and advice. Staff are good at making sure the centre is a safe place for you and your children. Parents and carers said they felt the centre has provided valuable support to improve self-confidence and help to manage their lives better, particularly parents with children aged nought to five years. The specialist services provided by external partners have helped to increase support available to families.

To develop further the work of the centre we have asked the centre and the school to improve the way they monitor and evaluate the quality of work undertaken, especially by external partners. We also agree with them that it needs to move forward its plans to get the parents forum working so that you can be more active in the running of the centre.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to speak with us and were willing to share your thoughts and feelings about the centre. 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.