

Inspection report for Croxteth Children's Centre

Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	373079
Inspection dates	22 – 23 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Tim Vaughan HMI

Centre governance	Liverpool City Council
Centre leader	Julie Taylor
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Our Lady & St Swithin's Catholic Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY383106 Croxteth Children's Centre

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 early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre coordinator, senior leaders, a range of centre staff and representatives from the local authority. Discussions were also held with parents and carers, members of the advisory board, partners and several service users. They observed the centre's work including in the on-site nursery, accompanied home visits and visits to outreach sites and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Croxteth Children's Centre developed from a local authority day nursery and was designated as a phase 2 children's centre in February 2006. It moved to new premises shared with Our Lady St Swithin's Catholic Primary School in 2009. The centre serves Croxteth a suburb of Liverpool that experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage, some parts of which are in the 10% most deprived areas in the country.

The population in the centre's reach area is mainly White British with small numbers of families from Polish, Chinese, Indian and African minority ethnic groups. The rate of adult worklessness in the local area is 18.5% which is below the city average and almost the same as the national figure. Three quarters of local housing is privately owned and most of the remainder is social housing.

The centre provides the full core offer in partnership with Our Lady St Swithin's Primary School. An advisory board oversees the work of the centre. The area has high levels of anti-social behaviour, which has resulted in residents being fearful to cross local geographical boundaries to access services. The centre delivers a range of outreach services from other local premises including schools, local community centre, lifelong learning centre and a local church.

Children's skills, knowledge and understanding on entry to nursery are well below the expected levels nationally for three- and four-year-olds. The proportion of children attending schools in the area who are known to be entitled to free school meals is more than double the national average. The proportion of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below the national average.

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

Over the past two years Croxteth Children's Centre has undergone a great deal of change and development. The centre now provides good support for children and families in the area and is increasingly effective and popular. This is because there is improved accountability to local people, improved premises and ways of working, greater partnership between different agencies, the passion and vision of the centre coordinator and the hard work of nursery and core centre staff to get to this point.

In 2009, the coordinator and staff used the move to new premises to leave behind the stigma that local people attached to the previous building. Centre services have also made increased use of outreach and home visiting across the area in order to make support more accessible. When the chair of the advisory board retired the centre used this as an opportunity. Two parents now successfully co-chair the board and two other parents are members. The centre has now become more accountable to local families, more responsive to their needs and as a result of their input the delivery of services has been enhanced.

The centre meets its core offer well. With the good support of partners, they successfully ensure that services are well integrated and that provision for users is cohesive and impacts positively on their lives. The centre is particularly effective at reducing isolation and building cohesion for local people. One of a group of parents who met an inspector said, 'We found each other through the centre. I didn't know someone who lived in the next road to me until I came here'.

The centre is a very safe environment in which to learn, play and work and provides high levels of care, support and advice to parents and children on a wide range of issues. Quality assurance and risk assessment systems for safeguarding are well established and that for the nursery has been improved since its inspection.

There is excellent support for families in crisis through outreach family support and strong multi-agency links. This has meant that many parents and carers comment upon how much that it has helped them. For example, one parent wrote when evaluating the support she receives that, 'This service has more or less saved my life. I've had so much help and support and the centre has given me hope'. Another parent said, 'The centre changes your life, it's hard because not everyone has their family. The staff aren't like strangers, they support you. We're totally settled now and I'm out looking for a job'.

Staff and the centre coordinator are reflective upon the quality of their work and use local knowledge to improve their services. They review the evaluations that are undertaken across centre activities and are well informed about the views of parents and carers. They have a clear understanding of the strengths in provision and where further improvement is still required. For example, they are aware that further work is needed to use the data from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile assessment of local children to further refine and target the centres' work. In addition, while the centre promotes equality and diversity effectively and evaluates the quality of provision frequently, not enough data is being used to demonstrate improvements in the engagement and achievement of different groups including those reluctant to engage with services. However, given the centre's recent improvement and along with its other strengths, its capacity to improve further is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve planning and evaluation by using local Early Years Foundation Stage Profile assessment data to judge the effectiveness of centre activities and plan improvements.
- Improve equality and diversity by using more data to evaluate the engagement and achievement by different groups of centre users and to show that gaps between groups are closing.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Effective partnership with health services has meant that there is an integrated approach to promoting and improving health in the local area. For example, the centre initiated the use of a universal home visiting schedule. Home visits are well established and as a result of effective promotion, breastfeeding initiation and at discharge from hospital has risen over the past three years. Smoking during

pregnancy has also decreased. Children with disabilities are well supported and the centre has supported transition of children into new settings and undertaken shared home visits with a local speech and language therapist. Developing a Well Baby Clinic and post-natal development review on-site has been welcomed by parents who prefer the community environment. As one said, 'I don't want to be sitting with my baby and a whole bunch of ill people'.

The information and advice provided about weaning, healthy eating, healthy exercise, nutrition and physical development is excellent. A weaning course led to parents feeling unafraid and excited about supporting their babies. Parents are preparing and cooking more fresh meals at home as a result of what they have learned on a healthy eating course at the centre.

Wider aspects of health are well supported. For example, oral health is promoted and parents receive practical help in visiting the dentists. Good links to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team and building the well-being of local people is at the heart of staff work. As a result many parents comment about how this helps them. One parent said, 'I was depressed. They helped a lot'. And another said of her child 'They taught my son to love again'.

In a community that has faced many challenges regarding safety, the centre is regarded by families as a safe and welcoming place. Children's safety in the home is improving as a result of centre workers visiting families to provide free home safety equipment and advice. Those parents escaping domestic violence talked of being well supported by a male centre worker, for example saying, 'He restored my confidence in men. I trusted him'. Outcomes for children on child protection plans are good because families are treated with genuine respect, given high quality supervised access and individualised support. This is enhanced by the integration of a highly effective outreach family support worker into the centre team.

Overall, children from the reach area make good progress from their starting points to the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage although data about this is not well used by the centre. The headteacher of the local school commented that children from the centre are well prepared for their subsequent learning. Parents enjoy learning at the centre and opportunities such as the 'crafty carers' group allows them to enjoy developing new skills whilst building friendships and learning from one another about employment, training and childcare choices. Strong links between the centre and local community organisations means that learning is highly valued and promoted.

The centre's role in the life of the community is good and improving. It provides opportunities for parents and children to be with others away from gang influenced views that some should not mix together. The opinions of local people are valued in the centre and parents feel listened to. Two parents co-chair the advisory board and have grown in their personal development as a result. Such links have helped the centre to understand the barriers felt by local people to engaging with professionals. As a result, staff actively listen to parents' feedback in centre groups and receive this

through the co-chairs of the management board who have a 'Facebook' social network page for parents to access.

Economic and social well-being of parents and carers is an area in which the centre has recently worked hard to make improvement. For example, parents and carers are supported with a good range of advice in securing benefits, budgeting, accessing local training courses and in returning to work. Those accessing the Volunteers into Placement (VIP) scheme show good progression from placement and the achievement of an NVQ, through to paid employment. The centre is aware that some local people do not like to cross community boundaries to access the Jobcentre Plus, consequently the link to the children's centre and to the VIP scheme are particularly invaluable. Complementing this, children are encouraged to be active, inquisitive and independent learners in the nursery and at stay and play sessions.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	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

Assessment of child and parent needs is built upon good knowledge of the community and strong links between agencies. One partner described the approach; 'at this centre it's not a scattergun approach; the centre supports individuals and focuses on individual needs'. The good links with health and social care means that the centre is able to ensure that users have highly personalised support when it is needed. The Common Assessment Framework is used well and strong partnerships and assessments of all children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities draw upon an appropriate range of professionals. Parents feel respected when discussing their needs with staff. This was illustrated by a parent commenting that, 'Even though they're professionals they're also friends. They don't look down on you. You don't get judged'.

Opportunities for formal and informal learning are regularly promoted through home visits to local families and services at a range of outreach sites. A monthly stay and

play rhyme time at a primary school at the other end of the reach area included promoting library access and modelling of storytelling for parents. The centre also links with local parent and toddler groups in order to promote learning and these groups are represented on the centre advisory board. Support from a link-school teacher from another local school and from the local authority early years consultant has helped to ensure that purposeful learning is well promoted across the centre and that activities are of good quality. For example, in the nursery, work as part of the Every Child a Talker programme has improved staff knowledge, children's language and parent awareness.

The centre has recently worked hard to reach out to the community. As a result, most local parents and children (including a large majority of children with special educational needs) are now registered with the centre. The proportion of parents using two or more centre activities has increased from a very low four per cent in 2009 to a current figure of 50.4%. The needs of most centre users are well met. Recent information shows that there is a growing Polish community and the centre has organised a Polish activities group, displayed some posters in the Polish language and also scheduled an ESOL classes in response to the identified needs of these and other families. Some data about contact with different groups is being recorded and the centre is working with partners and the local authority in order to look more closely at reach data.

The quality of care for children and parents is good. Support and advice is personalised to individual needs, is flexible and services use a range of outreach sites. In addition, high quality information and sign-posting is provided on a range of topics including parenting, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual health, adult training and breastfeeding. One parent indicated the value of this when saying that 'You feel proud. The centre has helped me to do this'.

The on-site nursery was found to be good when recently inspected. The inspection outcomes on record for other local Early Years Foundation Stage provision are mixed. For example, two local schools had satisfactory early years provision when inspected and one outstanding. The nearest private nursery to the centre was satisfactory and a playgroup was good. This illustrates why the partnerships that the centre is developing between providers and with the local authority early years team are important.

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	2

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	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre coordinator leads with clarity and commitment and values the work of her staff. They in turn respect her support and advice and feel enthused. There is not yet a leadership team in place to support the centre coordinator. The nursery manager is focussed on that part of the centre and the deputy coordinator role is currently being defined by the local authority. However, regular staff meetings are well used as a forum for discussing current issues and the centre activities. Staff have a positive approach, they evaluate their work and value the opportunities to learn from one another, from parents and partners as an integrated team. Evaluation of the centre's effectiveness is good overall but it is acknowledged that not enough use is made of Early Years Foundation Stage Profile data in centre review and planning.

Much time and attention has been given by the centre coordinator to developing the centre from its origins as a local authority day nursery for children in need to an integrated centre for all children and families. This has been achieved because of her vision and determination for improving services for the local community. Recently a review by the local authority has resulted in a proposal to close the centre nursery. Managing the impact of any such move for staff and parents has now become the main priority for the centre coordinator together with adjusting to any proposed budget reductions.

Whilst such challenges are currently being experienced by the centre there is strength in the effective support from the advisory board. This has become a very effective multi-agency group including police, schools, health and community development that is chaired and steered by parents. This has significantly helped the centre become much more able to meet parents' and carers' needs, as well as pursue strategic city-wide priorities. The voice of the community is sought and acted upon and this is leading to high levels of parental satisfaction with the centre. One of the parent co-chairs said, 'To sit on the board is an absolute pleasure'.

Well established partnership working further enhances what the centre is working to achieve. Relationships are very well established and effectively managed. There are good links between other agencies, the local authority including social care and with health. Together with good provision and good outcomes this means that value for money is good.

Effective safeguarding arrangements include all required policies and procedures to safeguard users and these are reviewed annually. All staff employed at the centre are subject to an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. The centre also

carefully checks CRB checks undertaken by partner agencies for staff working at the centre. Clear procedures are in place for recruitment and for checking people entering the premises. One parent commented how pleased she was that even though the staff know who she is, they always stop her at the reception to check and then get her to sign in. Other parents talked about being supported with their emotional needs and well-being and this was well illustrated by one who said, 'I was on my own. I couldn't even look at anyone. Now I'm employed and I'm helping others. It's changed my life'.

The centre promotes inclusion and this is supported by wall displays that show a range of ages, gender, disability, minority ethnic groups, community languages and cultures. In the nursery, children learn about the wider world by celebrating cultural and religious festivals and through a selection of resources which promote positive images of diversity. However, the overall approach taken is satisfactory. Centre staff are trained in equality and diversity, although not recently. The centre does not have sufficient data to demonstrate that it is targeting actions that lead to sustained and significant improvement in engagement, or, that achievement gaps between groups are closing.

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	2
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	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	2

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

The nursery at Croxteth Children's Centre EY383106 was inspected in August 2009 and judged to be good.

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 Croxteth Children's Centre on 22-23 March 2010. We found that the centre was good overall.

Thank you to the many parents who took time to speak to us and tell us about your centre. As I told some of you I would do, I am writing to say what we found out about the centre.

We were pleased that you have a centre that is now in better premises which can become a suitable place for all local young children and families. The fact that it is becoming well used is reassuring and reflects the hard work of nursery and core centre staff to get to this point.

It is was good to find that the centre uses a range of places such as St Cuthbert's Church, GEMS Community Centre, Alt Valley Communiversity, Croxteth Library, Emmaus Primary School, Our Lady & St Swithin's School and Croxteth Community Primary School to make support accessible for the whole community. To know that it also links with parent and toddler groups and does many visits to your homes is also good.

To find that two parents now successfully co-chair the advisory board and two other parents are board members was very reassuring. This is a centre for children and families and to have such parental involvement in important roles helps to make the centre fit for the needs of children and families in Croxteth.

Just as important is the good range of professionals from different organisations who work together to provide services through the children's centre. We found a strong commitment from these workers, who want to work in better and improved ways to support families in your community.

We were pleased that so many of you wanted to tell us what a difference that the centre has made to your lives. You said how it has made you more confident,

brought new friendships, helped you to be happier and better parents and helped you to access training and employment. It has also helped your children in their learning and development. Two parent comments show the impact of the centre; 'This children's centre is like my family' and 'Without the facilities here I'd be back where I was years ago'.

We feel that the centre can improve further by using information from the assessment of children at the end of their time in the Reception class in local primary schools. This would help the centre to look at how well the children are achieving and to improve the support for other children in the future. We also concluded that the centre can improve further by using more information about which different groups of people live locally, how often they use the centre and what they achieve in comparison to others.

Thank you once again for your help.

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