

Inspection report for Furze Children's Centre

Local authority	Barking and Dagenham
Inspection number	366437
Inspection dates	7–8 April 2011
Reporting inspector	Hilary Macdonald HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Caroline Darvell
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	1a Farrance Road Chadwell Heath RM6 6EB
Telephone number	0208 7241941
Fax number	0208 7241949
Email address	Caroline.darvell@lbbd.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Furze Infant School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Furze Children's Centre Nursery

The inspection of this Sure Start children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as inserted by section 199 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

Published: April 2011



Corporate member of
Plain English Campaign
Committed to clearer communication

361

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100024.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 100024

© Crown copyright 2010



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 manager, the senior management team, senior representatives from the local authority, parents, health representatives, front line staff, the Jobcentre Plus adviser and other children's centre partners. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation, including those relating to the centre's self-evaluation, improvement planning data and tracking information and a range of policies and procedures, including those relating to safeguarding.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate

Information about the centre

Furze Children's Centre is a phase two centre, located on the refurbished site of Furze Infant School. It is one of two children's centres serving the north of the borough of Barking and Dagenham, and one of eighteen children's centres in the borough in total. Furze and Wellgate Children's Centres work closely together, sharing a single management team and many staff. Furze has its own governance arrangements and parent forum.

The centre offers a range of integrated provision on site, but, due to its small size, additional provision is delivered from a number of venues. Outreach provision enables support to be given to families in their own homes.

The demographics of the reach area have changed very significantly in recent years. The immediate area around Furze Children's Centre is within the 30% most

disadvantaged areas. However, overall the ward falls within the 70% of less disadvantaged areas nationally. The long history of a predominantly White population has changed and the community is now ethnically diverse. Data indicate that the Black African and Indian populations have particularly increased. Unemployment is high, redundancy rates are increasing and numbers of young children in the borough and reach area have soared, resulting in the need for many additional Reception year places. Children's levels of skill on entry to the co-located nursery, school nursery and Reception class are greater for those children who have attended Furze Children's Centre, particularly in the areas of communication and social skills.

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for users and the wider community

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

Furze Children's Centre is an outstanding setting, providing high levels of carefully-tailored support to families and helping them tackle the difficulties and challenges they face. As a result, the lives and aspirations of the adults are enhanced and outcomes for children are rapidly improving. The centre delivers a warm and reassuring welcome to all, with visitors frequently being first met and welcomed by volunteer parents. The centre clearly lives up to its vision statement, 'We promise to make all children and their families feel welcome in our centres. We will give them a voice and work in an open, honest and respectful way to promote positive outcomes for the future.'

Centre staff are deeply committed. They are acutely aware of their own and others' roles and are adaptable and flexible in making a response to the specific requirements of families. Provision is based on excellent assessment of needs, coupled with respectful and supportive relationships. Typical comments from parents include, 'This centre really has changed my life,' and, 'I never knew I was able to do that, now I've done it and its all because of the help and support I've had. It's been truly amazing!'

The centre knows itself well. Highly effective management systems and structures are established, enabling staff to identify how and why their work, and that of many partners, is successful. The comprehensive data systems are fully effective in providing information that is used as both an improvement and evaluation tool. Data effectively demonstrate the centre's contribution to national and local targets as well as its impact on the lives and prospects of users. Meticulous monitoring ensures that no family slips through the net. Case files are well managed, and the centre and its partners continually adapt to meet the changing needs of users. Successful, but

determined to continue improving, centre leaders are able to set precise, appropriate measurable priorities, towards which they collectively focus their work and accurately record progress.

Despite its small size, the centre increasingly acts as a hub for community activity. It utilises other venues such as the library, the local church hall, the health centre and schools, from which to run events and to increase contact with local families. The parents' forum, Families4Furze, is amazingly successful! Grown with support and training on offer, this group is now a dynamic force that plays a significant part in extending the work of the children's centre further. Families4Furze has secured funding and provide free aerobics lessons in partnership with the children's centre, which provides a crèche. This and other activities, such as the International Café, provide opportunities for parents to support and encourage each other and to take part in a range of health-related activities. All of these help to raise users' self-esteem and aspirations. Centre users routinely become volunteers and those who want to embark on adult training are extremely well supported. A wide variety of courses are made available, from basic skills through to degree-level qualifications. Many parents talked in detail about the opportunities to develop work-related skills, and the very high level of support provided on site from the Jobcentre Plus adviser.

Safeguarding is given the highest priority at the centre. All parents and carers said that they feel safe when at Furze, and they are confident to leave their babies and children in the crèche. Staff are also kept safe. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure their well-being and safety as well as that of users.

Residents within the children's centre reach area speak a wide array of different languages, with many of these reflected in the children's centre users. Although there is room for a greater prevalence of documentation in other languages, communication is good between the staff, volunteers and parents and carers. Users comment positively on the support they receive to learn English and also how they are helped to gain an understanding of the services and support available to them. Children and parents with special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported with individual plans to ensure they can participate in the centre's activities. Family support workers provide outreach services to the most vulnerable families and strong links exist with the portage services.

Parents and carers are deeply supportive of the children's centre. They are involved in evaluations, have a parent forum and are well represented within governance arrangements. Despite this they are not yet exerting significant challenge or holding the children's centre to account. Fathers are currently under represented in the reach of the centre and this is being addressed through a planned programme. Well received ante- and post-natal care is offered from the centre, but the addition of other services, such as health visiting or immunisation programmes, would enhance provision even further. There is an extensive range of opportunities for babies and young children to take part in activities that promote their learning and development. Particularly impressive is the range of activities that promotes communication and language skills, such as 'Babbling Babes', as well as opportunities for parents and

other partners to take professional advice at a regular speech and language therapy clinic. Attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has shown a significant increase in language and communication skills.

As a result of detailed evaluation and analysis of the impact of each activity and service on users, the Furze senior management team and senior local authority colleagues possess an accurate understanding of the progress the centre is making towards achieving their challenging targets. Consequently, the centre demonstrates an outstanding capacity to sustain improvement. Outstanding value for money is assured. Staff are used to working within tight budget constraints, and sharp monitoring guarantees there is no duplication of services or provision within the local area. Excellent partnership working exists with the local authority and partner agencies in the delivery of single services and integrated provision.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase opportunities for health-related advice and care, such as health visiting and immunisation clinics.
- Increase the number of fathers accessing the children's centre, including by providing targeted activities.
- Further develop the role of parents on the Children's Centre Community Forum, enabling them to hold the centre to account and drive further improvements.

How good are outcomes for users?

1

The health and well-being of users in the Furze reach area are improving. The wealth of data that the local authority and centre rigorously gather, monitor and evaluate provides evidence of increased participation of vulnerable groups. The range of courses on offer, such as 'Getting ready for weaning' and 'Toddler Talk', helps parents to support their children from birth onwards to develop as happy and healthy children. Case studies, interviews with parents and evaluations demonstrate that the children's centre impacts positively on family health, for example by the promotion of healthy eating through courses and the parent-run café. Support for adults' emotional health and well-being is evidenced through users' feedback. One parent wrote, 'I was never made to feel like an outsider....I was experiencing low self-esteem and reduced confidence....the staff at Furze restored my confidence.' The mental health and well-being of babies and children are promoted through services such as baby massage and the recently-introduced fortnightly Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services clinic. The centre has prioritised the addition of more health-related courses and support groups, such as gaining Young People Friendly accreditation.

The ability of parents and carers to ensure that their children grow up in a safe environment is exceptionally well developed because of the high profile that the centre workers place on safety. Centre staff have a wealth of knowledge about safety in the home and provide users with a wide range of advice leaflets, such as 'Step safely with a helping hand' and 'Safe in their hands', which are targeted at different

groups of people, such as grandparents, who may be involved with keeping children safe. These leaflets act as reminders and add to the face-to-face support and advice given by family support workers.

Users say they feel very safe in the centre and rigorous risk assessments are routinely carried out. There has been a very significant decline in the number of children and families requiring the help of statutory services. This reflects the excellent working relationships that exist between Furze family support workers and social services, resulting in successful early identification and intervention. All support, including for those with a child protection plan, is extremely well coordinated. The Common Assessment Framework is used consistently well by all parties, additional needs are identified and coordinated service provision is delivered.

Individual children who have attended the children's centre have been tracked and Early Years Foundation Stage data demonstrate the centre's impact on all areas of learning. This was particularly notable for boys, who made significantly greater progress during their Reception year than boys who had not attended the children's centre. The commitment to early speech and language development is demonstrated through the Every Child A Talker project and in the provision of activities such as 'Little Rhyme Makers'. The impact of these projects is demonstrated in the increasing communication and language skills of children as they start school.

Children's behaviour observed at 'Little Rhyme Makers' was lively and enthusiastic, revealing their enjoyment in learning. Many parents have become confident adult learners. The volunteer programme and the parent forum provide a first step for many parents to engage in the life and work of the centre. As a result of the opportunities and the quality of support and advice provided, users have obtained a large number and variety of qualifications and some parents have gained paid employment.

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, and their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
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 and employment	1

How good is the provision?

1

A significant strength of the centre is the staff and partners' abilities to recognise need. Skilled staff engage parents and families swiftly and sensitively, building confidence and trust. Respect between partners, joined-up planning, excellent communication and individually-tailored programmes result in users routinely receiving the help they require.

Families seeking or needing help face no barriers and, by working in a persistent and open manner, the centre ensures that those who are hardest to reach and need support the most do receive it. Tracking data show a significant increase in contact with those who are hard to reach.

Although many users first access the centre for a particular activity or course, they feel so welcome that for many this has become a centre of their community. The crèche provision is highly regarded. Some of the staff were originally parents who visited the centre, then became volunteers or took on apprenticeships and are now local authority employees. The crèche allows those without strong networks of support to access courses and training. The centre effectively uses the range of support systems within the local authority and its increasingly close ties with local schools to ensure continuity of care and learning for all, including those with additional educational needs and/or disabilities.

Furze Children's Centre is highly responsive to the needs of users and the wider community. Examples include sharing space with the co-located infant school for children to eat packed lunches or attend cookery club, hosting the locally elected councillor's surgery and the recent review of the activities timetable. As a result of the latter, timetabled activities now run throughout school holidays, with additional events to engage older children.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. All workers know each other and the families well and are deeply committed to providing the highest levels of care. They respond sensitively to those who present with more profound challenges, and case studies and conversations with parents confirm the skill, tenacity and care of staff, particularly the family support team and Jobcentre Plus adviser. Parents spoken to were appreciative of the quality of support and expressed their desire to 'give something back' to 'the big family' who had supported them.

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	1
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The collaborative leadership of the centre and its determination to secure further improvement are outstanding and drive all its actions. The local authority structure is clear and understood by all staff and partners. All front-line staff are enabled to work in an integrated way with clear lines of support, high-quality professional supervision and accountability. Professional development of staff is afforded high priority and arises from focused performance management arrangements. The different management groups, governance arrangements and partners work effectively together, sharing information and accountability, and challenge each other appropriately. Local authority managers and senior staff are rigorous in their oversight of the day-to-day work of the centre. Although governance and some leadership arrangements have changed recently, the clear terms of reference that are in place mean this has not resulted in any dip in performance. Well-aligned priorities and ambitious targets reflect both national and local needs. Services and resources are targeted very effectively where they are most needed and will have greatest impact.

Arrangements for safeguarding children are exemplary. Staff are vigilant at all times and are all aware of how to raise concerns. Leaders ensure that everybody working with children has been rigorously checked and those involved in recruitment have received appropriate additional training. All staff undertake regular safeguarding training, particularly in child protection procedures. Posters around the centre, covering a range of issues, further ensure the high profile of safeguarding matters.

Statutory duties regarding equality and diversity are fully complied with and all user groups are fully represented in the cultural, religious and national celebrations that take place through the year. Black History Month celebrations are currently captured in a display created by one of the members of the parents' forum. Parents' and other users' views are routinely gathered through evaluations, surveys and case studies. These views are used to refine and shape provision so that it accurately reflects the needs and desires of the local community.

The local authority provides outstanding support to the centre and recognises and celebrates the centre's achievements. Senior officers effectively assist the centre's ongoing developments and have the highest expectations of its performance. The local authority's data systems are comprehensive and sophisticated, allowing data to be presented as an accessible and usable tool for tracking, evaluating and improving the centre's performance, including assessing its contribution to local and national performance indicators. Self-evaluation, based on the data and the centre's own wealth of evaluative information, is highly accurate.

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood

1

The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	1

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

None

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 Furze Children's Centre on 7 and 8 April 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

Furze Children's Centre has grown to become viewed by many as being at the heart of the local community. The very strong leadership of the centre and the enthusiastic and skilled staff provide you and your children with a range of excellent services that they adapt and refine in order to meet your wishes and your needs.

Those of you we spoke to told us how much you appreciate the centre. You told us how much you enjoy the activities provided and how much more you have gained from your involvement, such as new friendships and the many opportunities to become involved in some sort of volunteering or adult learning programmes. Some of you have responded to the chance to be involved in the running of the centre and

you make an extremely important contribution through the parent forum, Families4Furze, and through the Children's Centre Community Forum. However, you are not yet fully confident to challenge and question centre leaders.

Those of you who use the centre know a great deal about keeping your families safe and healthy. Although you are happy with the ante- and post-natal services that run from the centre, we agreed it would be of benefit to increase the number of health-related services available on site – such as having a health visitor and an immunisation clinic.

Many of you take part in the range of adult learning opportunities on offer. Some of you talked about the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes and how these have helped you develop both your English speaking skills and greater confidence. Others of you talked about how it was possible to become a volunteer and the different skills you could build, such as office work, including filing, answering the phone and, very importantly, being the first face-to-face contact for people, welcoming them and supporting them as they come to your children's centre. Other opportunities include supporting some of the regular activities such as 'Play with a Story' running from the local library. All of these opportunities have resulted in an excellent take up of further learning and training and some of you are now in paid employment as a result. Jobcentre Plus provides excellent on-site advice and support.

You all appreciate the crèche that is on offer when classes are taking place and are confident that your children are well looked after. You enjoy the range of activities to take part in with your child, although the lack of space does provide a challenge. Increasingly, other venues are being used for certain activities. Children and parents learn about good communication through a range of activities, including 'Babbling Babes' and 'Little Rhyme Makers'. Not only are these activities fun, they are really making a difference to your children's speech and language development. Children who have attended the children's centre are now getting off to a better start at school.

With the centre's encouragement you make an outstanding contribution to the centre and to the local community. Your great success in securing substantial funding for the parents' group means that you are able to run free aerobics classes that are open to all members of the community. You are running the fortnightly International Café, offering all visitors the chance to taste home cooking from different cultures and countries, and you share your recipes freely. In addition to volunteering you also provide essential feedback to the centre regarding the quality of provision and how the centre could even better meet your needs. As a result, things change. For example, the timing of certain groups has changed, the programme of events now runs throughout the year and more thought is being given to activities for your school-aged children during the holidays.

You told us that at the moment not many fathers are actively engaged with the centre. Centre leaders have identified this as an area for improvement and we have

asked them to do more to encourage a greater number of fathers to become more engaged in the events and opportunities at Furze Children's Centre.

The care, guidance and support that you and your children receive are excellent. This is because all staff are sensitive and knowledgeable. They are able to work with you, considering your needs and helping you to decide how you would like to change or improve your lives. They know all about the range of services and people who could help further and therefore ensure you can access the right services and support for you.

We would like to thank those of you who spared the time to talk to us and were willing to share your personal stories of how the centre has helped you. This helped us to build an accurate picture of Furze Children's Centre. We wish you, your families and the centre all the very best for the future.

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