

Inspection report for Garston Children's Centre

Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	367802
Inspection dates	9-10 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Janet Glover

Centre governance	Liverpool
Centre leader	Kathy Perry
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Banks Road Primary
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Garston 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.

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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, health professionals, local community partners, advisory board members, governing body representatives, local authority representatives, user groups, parents, carers and children who use the centre.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation including key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents, its business plans, evaluations of services and data about people who use the centre.

Information about the centre

Garston Children's Centre is a phase one children's centre located in the south area of the City of Liverpool. It is a purpose built centre providing the full core offer of services. The centre serves a population that experiences high levels of social and economic disadvantage, with eight Super Output Areas (SOAs) in the five per cent most deprived areas in the country. The centre also serves a number of more affluent SOAs. Most families are of White British heritage with a very small minority from other ethnic groups. The centre operates as a 'one-stop-shop' model. A multi-agency team that includes health visitors, midwives, Citizens Advice Bureau, speech and language therapists and mental health workers delivers services at the centre. The centre uses a number of community venues, including schools and local churches to deliver services across its reach area. The centre comes under the line management of the local authority which undertakes the performance management of the centre. The centre coordinator leads the core staff team and the centre's advisory board supports the strategic direction of the centre.

The centre includes a local authority day nursery, which is registered for 46 children aged nought to five years. There is Early Years Foundation Stage provision and a

variety of 'wrap around' provision for children. Most children enter early years education with knowledge and skills that are broadly typical for their age. Of the children currently enrolled, eight have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They are effectively integrated into their rooms and positively regarded and supported by their peers. The centre has good links with two local primary schools which support children in accessing their early education sessions. The centre provided additional childcare facilities in a registered crèche for parents and carers attending activities and training at the centre.

The total number of parents registered at the time of the inspection was 1633. Of those, 962 were in employment and 389 were registered as unemployed. There is no available data regarding the percentage of families claiming workless benefits. The area is experiencing vast local regeneration. New social and private housing stock, industrial estates and shopping areas are changing the environment and its community.

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

Garston Children's Centre meets the needs of its users well. Parents, carers and users of the centre value the inclusive, welcoming environment that it offers. They appreciate the friendly, approachable staff, who build high levels of trust among families. The view, shared by all who are connected with Garston, that the needs of each individual child and their families are of high importance, underpins the good care, guidance and support it provides. Centre staff are flexible and responsive and ensure that all users are welcomed and respected. One parent, reflecting the views of many, said 'the centre has changed my whole life. Before I never left the house, I was very depressed and could not socialise...I am now attending all sorts of courses and activities which have made me a much more confident person and mother.' Relationships between staff, children, parents and carers are good, promoting positive cohesion in the community. Provision in the centre is good overall with strengths in the quality of activities provided. These ensure productive, enjoyable learning and development opportunities for children and their families. The centre

offers a wide variety of activities to those who access its services but faces the challenge of better engaging with the most disadvantaged and harder-to-reach families within the area it serves. The centre has a committed and enthusiastic team in place with strong local authority input. The centre knows where it needs to be and how it will get there. The centre demonstrates a good capacity to improve. Outcomes for families and children are improving well and the leader's positive and open willingness to discuss and review strategies is accelerating the speed at which change is implemented.

The centre's approach to safeguarding is rigorous and ensures that families are protected and engaged in a range of services that improve their safety and well-being. The provision is good overall with a wide range of multi-disciplinary teams delivering services from the centre. The promotion of equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination are central to the work of the centre. Staff provide a fully inclusive environment where everyone is valued and has a voice. Children state that they feel safe and are listened to. The monthly Saturday event, 'Dads' Army', is well attended and enjoyed by both children and their fathers or carers. The centre works hard to integrate children with special educational needs and/or disabilities into all provision. These children build meaningful relationships with their peers and these support them through into school. Provision is carefully adapted to meet the needs of individual users and families within the community, including the most vulnerable, and has a positive impact on their lives. Families and children receive comprehensive assessments when they join the centre. These ensure the right support is provided for the vulnerable and those who need support in times of acute need or crisis. The thriving childminder network uses many of the centre's services and resources. Childminders also access training such as safeguarding. The centre's outreach work is currently underdeveloped and some of the most vulnerable families are not always effectively reached.

The centre is developing an increased understanding of the impact of its provision. However, provision, although well-targeted, is not well enough adapted to meet the needs of all groups of users. Multi-agency partnerships are well-established and responsive to meet the needs of families. One parent who had suffered severe post-natal depression and experienced bonding issues stated, 'without the centre I would have lost my home, my mind and my children... they picked me up and slowly put me back together whilst providing the children with a safe place.' There is an active parents' forum that meets quarterly to represent the views of its users. The centre demonstrated its willingness to listen when, following feedback from parents and carers, the reception area was changed to make it friendlier. Similarly, baby changing facilities were installed in a bathroom within the reception area for ease of access and to preserve the privacy of older children using the toilets where they were previously located.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the strengths in provision and the potential areas for improvement. For example, they are well aware that the centre does not currently reach all families in the area. The centre now has access to e-start data and has begun to use this information to plan and review provision against its

impact. The centre's self-evaluation does not focus well enough on the impact of its services. This hinders more successful planning and the setting of achievable targets for the future. The centre is fully aware of this and has begun to review the process to enable leaders to set more realistic and challenging targets and to monitor and review outcomes and provision more frequently. The leadership is well supported by the local authority which has a high regard for this centre and its work.

The centre has successfully raised outcomes for users since opening, due to enthusiastic and determined leadership. The advisory board includes parent representation and is wholly supportive of the work of the centre. However, the advisory board's ability to evaluate fully the impact of the centre's work is limited. This is because the centre does not set measurable targets and timescales against which to do this. The local authority increasingly provides strong quality assurance of the centre's work.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Review provision by using the information gained from more effective monitoring and evaluation in order to meet the needs of the entire reach area and those who use the centre, and to secure a better understanding of the impact of the centre's work.
- In consultation with partners and users, review the development plans to include challenging targets against local and strategic priorities so progress towards these targets can be effectively measured over time.
- Identify and better engage with groups in the community who do not currently access the centre's services, particularly those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Outcomes are improving well in all areas. This is because the centre provides a good range of activities that are developed particularly well in partnership with other agencies and parents and carers. The strong integration of this work, with the child being central to all activities, is the heart of the centre's success. Children and families are supported to make healthy choices through a series of well-planned activities and the excellent choice of food provided by the cook. For example, the 'Yum Yum Yummy' and 'Can Cook' studio programmes have helped parents and children explore foods, develop skills and prepare healthy food. Parents and carers attending such courses say that they are improving their own health and that of their children. Take-up is high and professionals take every opportunity to advise and support attendees, as well as signposting prospective mums to specialist services such as immunisations, dental care, smoking cessation and breastfeeding advice. The centre has just begun a programme called 'Bosom Buddies'. This offers training and support from peer mentors to those breastfeeding. Evaluations and discussion with

parents clearly identify the positive impact of these programmes. However, there is little analysis of collated data and feedback on how this information, both formal and informal, is used to measure impact or feed into subsequent planning.

All services offered in the centre keep users safe. The centre's good relationships with families and their children allow staff to identify any safety concerns within families and to intervene quickly. The centre does not have many active plans in place to support Common Assessment Framework (CAF) processes as many partners state that the paperwork is too much to complete. However, the centre has worked with these professionals and a number of pre-CAFs are being completed for centre staff and others to follow through. Evidence from case studies and discussion with parents and carers provide strong evidence that access to good quality behaviour management support, along with good support from sensitive centre staff, improve relationships, behaviour and home safety for users and their children. Staff model safe practices well and the centre is a safe and welcoming place to be.

Observations of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision show that children are successfully developing skills for the future and transitions are particularly well managed. With advice, guidance and support from the link teacher of the adjacent school, children are well prepared for nursery and mainstream school due to the effective delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Evidence from the link school shows that children who have come from the centre are ahead of their peers from other settings and from home when they begin the Reception Year. Similarly, by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, although still below average, the skills of children who have been involved with the centre are more advanced than those of other children.

Children are provided with high quality learning experiences that have a positive impact on their learning and development. The nursery's clear and detailed tracking information through learning journey logs show that children make good progress with their learning in the nursery. The centre provides a diverse and inviting setting with stimulating outdoor provision that promotes children's physical health and allows them to take risks in a safe, well-supervised environment. Children are interested and engaged in their environment and confidently initiate learning and try new activities. This learning is carefully evaluated and future activities planned, ensuring that all children achieve well and develop good personal and social skills. Parents' and carers' and children's enjoyment is evident through the consistently high attendance at drop-in activities and the high take-up of nursery and crèche places. The nursery currently only has eight children-in-need funded places out of 46 full-time equivalent places. There is a high take-up of places within the nursery from children from outside the reach area and there is a waiting list. Parents interviewed stated that they would like more targeted places for those who live within the reach area and more assisted places to be made available to support more families-in-need.

The number of parents and carers using the centre who are in paid employment is high. However, support from Jobcentre Plus and other agencies means that parents

can access information, advice and guidance on returning to work or accessing jobs and training in the centre. Of 13 women who accessed support through an employment agency in the past 12 months, all have gained employment. The centre works well with the local college to access courses and training for parents and carers. Users are regularly asked informally for their views through the parents' forum or discussions with staff. The users interviewed talked of the speed at which the centre reacted to feedback, implementing many changes immediately where possible. There are two representatives from the parents' forum on the advisory board. They are very positive about how they are kept informed and their views gathered on all aspects of the strategic and operational work of the centre.

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

A highly effective assessment process identifies the needs of all children at an early stage and ensures that all children make good progress. Assessment of individual cases is robust. However, there is still a lack of support from professional partners in the use of the CAF so that teams can be gathered quickly to support children and families identified as in need. The centre provides a good range of services. Well planned drop-in activities such as baby massage, 'Baby Dreams', 'Book Start' and 'Messy Monsters' are helping parents to enjoy parenthood. Parents on a 'Webster Stratton' parenting course were positive, stating how the strategies and tools shared on the programme brought about great changes within their families and helped where bonding issues had been identified. One parent commented that, 'the course made me realise I was not the only one feeling like this...I was not a monster, just lonely and frightened with nowhere to run to.'

Senior leaders and staff constantly seek ways to identify the needs of specific groups and to tailor activities accordingly. For example, a number of sessions including the 'Fag Ends', have been programmed for early evening to allow the parents who work to attend. The centre realises that it does not do enough to engage the hardest-to-

reach families. There is a lack of focus on young parents. The numbers of young parents who access services in the area are dwindling since Garston ceased to jointly deliver services with an adjacent children’s centre. The centre is working with partners to gain the information it needs to target these families and to identify other venues to ensure accessibility for all.

Parents report that the quality of individual support is good and available when they need it. For those whose needs are greatest, support workers provide close, personal support at the centre and within users’ homes. Careful strategies are in place to ensure parents and carers can build their confidence and parenting skills, and also be supported to independence, at a pace that is appropriate to them. The centre is very aware that its outreach work with the hardest-to-reach families could be more effective and strategies are now in place to address this. However, it is too early to see the impact of these actions. The centre supports well those users who experience depression, financial crisis and domestic violence. They give parents and carers the confidence to attend the centre. Here, good relationships encourage them to take part in activities such as ‘Incredible Years Parenting’, which gives valuable help and advice in childcare and behaviour management. For the families involved, evidence shows that this support makes the difference between improving life chances or settling for an inability to cope. Good care, guidance and support, together with multi-agency working, ensure that registered families access the right kind of support. This may be from nurture groups or one-to-one guidance and advice accessed either in the centre or at home. Similarly, family or parenting support, specialist health services, or just having fun in the increasing range of community fun days and holiday activities the centre provides, all offer the same degree of effective support.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	3
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre manager is highly experienced and enthusiastic and leads a well-motivated team. The staff are all determined to make a difference to children and families in the local area and beyond. Inclusion of all is central to the centre’s vision. Positive role models and resources, reflecting all members of the community, highlight the centre’s determination to include all groups who may be subject to discrimination. This includes successfully meeting the needs of children with special

educational needs and/or disabilities. The centre actively promotes equal opportunities and incorporates anti-discriminatory practices. Diversity is celebrated well in all aspects of the centre’s work.

Secure safeguarding procedures ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. Clear protocols are implemented by staff and other agencies working in the centre with regard to reporting any concerns relating to children’s welfare or possible abuse. These procedures are used by a range of professional agencies to monitor children’s welfare and to provide appropriate support where necessary. Comprehensive risk assessments are systematically carried out to ensure the safety of all users when accessing services organised by the centre. The centre works well with partners and local agencies to ensure that information is shared quickly and effectively to provide early intervention. For example, staff work with a local centre providing support for post-natal women. They are visited and supported to access services from the centre through midwife or health visitor referrals. These procedures help to safeguard both mothers and children. Health professionals speak highly of the professionalism of the centre and see multi-agency working as one of its strengths. The centre provides good value for money through its use of resources and staffing and the outcomes it achieves.

The centre’s self-evaluation form and supporting development plans do not fully address local and national priorities. National and local data are available but are not always used well to inform development planning or to help the centre to set targets or timescales. This means that the information collated and the quality of evaluation and feedback gained does not fully inform future planning and developments. The local authority management information available about the reach area has greatly improved and the challenge for the centre is to use this in a meaningful way to review trends and action that then feed into the next planning cycle. Some partners provide timely and relevant information to influence the development of the provision but this is inconsistent across all providers. The centre’s leadership is aware of new and more effective ways of planning and evaluating services along with their impact. Work has already started to implement this within the centre. The centre is aware that it does not review its outreach work. This limits access to services by the wider community and the most vulnerable within the area the centre serves.

Partnership working is effective and good use is made of shared resources to develop services where needs are identified. Partners value the centre along with the resources and opportunities that they can access while providing a seamless service to families. A representative advisory board is in place and provides supportive governance. It currently lacks leadership and direction in how to offer more rigorous challenge to the centre. It does not use evaluation effectively enough to bring about change.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<p>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</p>	<p>3</p>
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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	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	2
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3

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 Garston Children's Centre on 9 and 10 May 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

We found that your centre has many strengths, including the actions taken to support you and your children's safety and well-being. All the staff provide strong care, guidance and support and are valued by all who attend. Many of you come to sessions regularly and told us how much difference the centre makes to your lives. We visited a number of activities, looked at the centre's plans and documents and had discussions with some of you and some professionals.

Staff at the centre offer you and your children good quality care, guidance and support. The centre is working with many organisations such as schools, the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), health and social care professionals to improve the range of services that are available to you. These partnerships are helping many families and children, particularly those who are most disadvantaged, to have a better start in life. You gave us many examples of how the centre has helped you to gain confidence and build up good parenting skills.

The centre offers a good range of programmes and activities, including those aimed at improving the health of people in your area. The recent baby massage programmes are helping mums to bond and play with their babies. Future mums can now book in with the midwife at the centre. There is plenty of advice and support available at the centre on debt management from the CAB and also on how to stop smoking.

Those of you who spoke to us describe the centre as providing a safe and welcoming environment. You are confident that your children will be secure and well cared for here. Some parents and carers explained just how important a role the centre plays in their lives as well as improving family life. Many of you told us that staff listen to you and help you to get the right help and support. We found that the centre was very effective in helping families at times in their lives when they most need it. The support is provided quickly and professionals and others work closely together to support both families and children.

The centre makes sure that staff check whether you have enjoyed any courses or sessions in the centre. They respond by making changes following your comments. Those of you who take part in courses such as 'Webster Stratton' say how effective they are in helping you to understand your children's development, in building confidence and self-esteem, and in helping you to develop good relationships with your children.

The centre is respected in the local community because of the leadership from the manager and her team. You told us how much you value them all individually. The manager knows that the centre is not succeeding in attracting those who are most vulnerable to access the centre and its services. We have asked the centre to monitor more closely the uptake of services across the whole of the area and by different groups. The parents' forum is thriving and represents fully all of its community. We have asked the centre manager to make the centre more effective by collecting more useful information on the difference that the centre is making in families and children's lives. She and her team are also going to set challenging and measurable targets which can be more easily checked so that staff know exactly what the impact of the centre is and to ensure that even more people can experience the good things that the centre provides.

Thank you for helping us with the inspection. We wish you well for the future.

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