

Inspection report for Little Oaks Children's Centre

Local authority	Bury Metropolitan Borough Council
Inspection number	365692
Inspection dates	19-20 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Rachael Flesher HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Deborah Margiotta
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Broad Oak Sports College
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY393746

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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with parents and carers, centre staff and representatives from professional partnerships, board of governors, advisory board and the local authority.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Little Oaks Children's Centre is situated on the site of Broad Oak Sports College, in a residential area in the east of Bury. It is a phase two stand alone children's centre and serves a community living in one of the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. The centre was designated in January 2008 but did not start providing services until 2009, when the building was completed and staff appointed. Due to the size and geography of the reach area the centre operates two outreach venues; The Mosses Centre in Cecil Street and a purpose built children's centre room at Fairfield Primary School. The centre provides the full core offer.

Families living in the centre reach area face issues of worklessness, poor housing, homelessness, poverty and domestic violence. A high number of households claim benefits and the children's centre reach area has the highest unemployment figures in the borough. The children's centre serves a community that is culturally diverse with the largest black and minority ethnic population in the borough and includes families of White British, African, Eastern European and Asian heritage. There are a growing number of asylum-seeking families in the community, the highest in the borough. The children's centre has also seen a growing number of refugee families to the area. Children enter the local Early Years Foundation Stage provision with

skills well below those expected for their age. The centre has been awarded the gold award in the Golden Apple Scheme for healthy eating.

Governance of the centre is provided by a board of governors and the centre has an advisory board, both of which are made up of representatives from various professional partnerships and the local community, parents and carers and centre staff. The children’s centre provides a crèche which is registered with Ofsted. This was not inspected at the same time as the centre and was last inspected in 2010. The report can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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

Leadership and management are outstanding. Outcomes for users and quality of provision are good overall, with some aspects judged as being outstanding. The centre makes extremely good use of its resources, including staff, to meet the needs of the reach area. However there are increasing numbers of families in the reach area who access the centre. Although the centre is currently able to meet users needs very well they are very aware that the increasing demand for centre services will need to be met by the small children’s centre team. As a result the centre’s capacity for sustained improvement is good leading to good overall effectiveness.

The promotion of equality and diversity within the community is at the heart of the children’s centre. Through rigorous assessments, user engagement, evaluation and monitoring, the centre leader and staff ensure provision is extremely well matched to the needs of the users, particularly the most vulnerable groups and those hard to reach. As a result, participation rates and outcomes for key target groups are good and improving rapidly.

The centre’s policies, procedures and work with families and key agencies in safeguarding children are exceptional, significantly enhancing children’s safety and well-being. Most families are engaging well with services provided to support their good health and well-being. Parents and carers are developing a good understanding of how to be healthy and the take up of healthy lifestyles is improving. However, the

centre is provided with very little information from health partners to enable them to target expectant parents in order to improve the reach of services, secure early intervention and achieve better outcomes.

The principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage are embedded across the children's centre provision and local early years provision is of good quality. As a result, children make good progress from their very low starting points in developing the skills that will help them in the future. However, too many children are not achieving expected levels at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre is aware of the need to continue to develop their work with local schools, parents and carers to ensure that all those involved are fully supporting children in order to improve their achievement.

The children's centre has established extremely strong partnerships, with governance and accountability arrangements in place which contribute significantly to the success of the centre. All those involved in the leadership and management of the centre take an active role in ensuring provision is highly responsive to the changing needs of the community and that it has the desired impact, is sustainable and that it provides excellent value for money. This is achieved through the rigorous evaluation and performance management systems in place, where all are held to account, and challenging targets are set to secure continuous improvement. Morale is very high and belief in the centre's success runs through all levels of staff and partners.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should secure and develop information sharing systems with midwifery services to:
 - ensure the children's centre can reach more expectant parents
 - enable the centre to secure early intervention and prevention and achieve better outcomes.

- Improve children's achievement by working closely with all schools in the reach area to:
 - help prepare children for school
 - strengthen data tracking systems.

- Consider further strategies to equip parents and carers with confidence, skills and accessible resources to further promote their children's learning and development at home.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre is outstanding at keeping users safe because children and families using services at the centre are extremely well safeguarded. Families are confident to turn to the centre in times of crisis and the centre has successfully supported many vulnerable families. Case studies show the highly positive impact the centre has had on outcomes for children subject to the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process and children subject to child protection plans. It is reducing the numbers of those needing child protection plans, and preventing situations reaching crisis point, due to the early intervention and support provided. Through the activities provided by high quality staff, parents, carers and children are developing a very good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Outreach workers are extremely vigilant and well trained to identify any issues in the home environment that may put family's safety at risk and are swift to act and deploy preventative strategies. The centre has taken significant steps to narrow the gap between the most disadvantaged and the rest and outcomes for key target groups are improving at a good pace.

Health partners state the children's centre has been invaluable in providing universal and targeted services and reaching the community. Users accessing a clinic run by the link Health Visitor stated 'we prefer to come to the centre than go into town. It's friendlier.' The centre has been successful in engaging parents and carers and encouraging the take up of healthy lifestyles. For example, preparing healthy home cooked food on a budget and enjoying the weekly 'Lets get buggy!' walks to the local park. Despite the work of the centre staff and health professionals, breastfeeding rates remain low. The centre is not reaching enough expectant mothers to enable them to support this group through early intervention as it is not provided with information to locate and target them. Immunisation rates are good and the centre signposts parents and carers to the health visitor to enable them to make an informed decision. The centre has commissioned the support of a smoking cessation nurse who runs a programme of support for expectant women to help them stop smoking, with good outcomes.

Users report their engagement with the centre is enjoyable. Children, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress from their very low starting points, towards the early learning goals, due to the good quality early years provision. However, not all parents and carers are receiving clear guidance on how to support their child's learning at home in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage. Partnerships with all schools are not fully developed to ensure continuity and progression for all children. Good transition arrangements are in place with some, but not all schools, to ensure children and their families are fully prepared for school.

Parents and carers are achieving good economic and social well-being due to the good support and guidance provided by the centre and partners. The centre can demonstrate particular success with the work it has done to support teenage mothers, all of whom are in education, employment or training. The 'Managing your

money' course fully promotes parents and carers economic understanding and users state 'we are beginning to save money for our household.'

The children's centre is welcoming to all and with great determination has established itself at the heart of the community. Users have extremely good opportunities to participate in the governance of the centre and their views are regularly and meaningfully sought through targeted focus groups and evaluations of services. These are used to shape services to ensure provision is matched to the needs of the community and vulnerable groups.

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	1
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 the needs of children and their families are extremely effective and rigorous, with excellent partnership working to ensure assessments are well-informed. This ensures services are tailored to individual needs, which in turn improves participation and outcomes.

The quality and range of services offered by the centre, or on their behalf, are good and meet the needs of users, including target groups, well. This is due to the centre and partner services sharing an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the changing needs of the community and securing services and provision accordingly. The centre ensures equality of access for all users. For example, by providing a high quality crèche for parents and carers to enable them to access courses and sessions, which they greatly value. One user stated 'during the holidays you can bring older children as well with no cost'. The centre also uses translation services to provide information in a range of languages and employs bilingual staff to ensure good communication with all users. This has had a significant impact on how welcome users feel and their safety and welfare.

Users value the excellent care, guidance and support provided by the children’s centre. They recognise the impact it has had on their lives. For example users commented ‘without this centre I wouldn’t meet anyone’, ‘I wouldn’t come out of the house if it wasn’t for coming to the children’s centre’ and ‘there is always somebody there if you need help or advice’. Staff go above and beyond that expected of them to provide extremely effective personalised support for children and their families to develop their well-being across all outcomes. Case studies show a range of examples of how the centre have supported families in times of crisis and worked tirelessly to secure the support they desperately need.

The children’s centre provides good quality activities and services and promotes purposeful learning well. Parents and carers are improving their educational and personal development and are encouraged to build on their achievements and progress to employment, education and training. The centre also works closely with local early years provision to ensure this is of good quality. This is leading to good and improving outcomes for families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
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 centre leader is extremely tenacious and passionate about improving the outcomes for children and their families in the reach area, and this infectious enthusiasm feeds down to all levels of service delivery. Excellent professional supervision and management arrangements are in place to monitor the performance of staff and ensure ongoing professional development. All staff and partners are committed to evaluation and reflective practice and convincingly provide evidence to hold them accountable and to demonstrate the impact of the services and activities on outcomes. All have a strong understanding of the targets for improvement and what needs to be done to achieve these.

The centre has an excellent governing body and advisory board, with a wide range of skills, knowledge and experience who take an extremely active role in the centre. The attendance and participation of members is robust and sustained over time and meetings are broad ranging and challenging. The centre leader has in place

extremely robust systems for gathering a wide range of information from staff and partners and interpreting this into data and evidence. This is then used by all leaders to monitor user engagement, set challenging targets and demonstrate the impact of the centre services and activities on outcomes for children and their families. The centre leader provides regular feedback to the local authority, board of governors and advisory board, who challenge the centre with rigour. As a result, all those involved have a strong handle on the performance of the centre and financial position.

Resource planning, including the employment of staff skills and expertise is very well established, responsive to changing needs and takes very good account of the need to ensure services are sustainable. The centre utilises the available resources to full effect. The centre has very limited staff and a relatively small building for the size of the reach area. However it has achieved good outcomes for the community by investing in high quality staff, utilising outreach facilities and developing extremely strong partnerships with a range of services. This has resulted in the centre very successfully engaging and supporting the needs of a high number of the most vulnerable families in the area and those hard to reach. The centre leader has a very firm handle on finances and ensures all services and activities are sustainable and provide excellent value for money.

Robust safer recruitment procedures are followed and all relevant checks are made to ensure that all staff are suitable and safe to work with children. All staff receive very good quality child protection training and are highly confident in, and fully informed of their duties to safeguard children. Great importance is placed on the safety and welfare of all those who use the centre and risks are assessed rigorously and minimised accordingly.

The centre has very successfully engaged a range of vulnerable groups, and those hard to reach, with the centre and services. For example, the asylum seeking community and minority ethnic groups. The centre has built an extremely strong partnership with The Mosses Centre, a community centre situated in the reach area and has commissioned one of the workers to complete outreach work on their behalf. The centre has also employed a bilingual worker. This has significantly increased the engagements with these groups. A wide range of strategies are used very successfully to seek the views of users and the wider community. These views are then used to shape services ensuring they are correctly matched to need, resulting in high user satisfaction.

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	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 Little Oaks Children's Centre on 19 and 20 May 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you to those of you who contributed to the inspection. Like you, we found your children's centre to be very welcoming and friendly. High priority is given to safeguarding your children and the staff are extremely skilled and knowledgeable in making sure you and your children are safe and protected. The centre works extremely well with other services and professionals, and has highly effective systems in place to assess the needs of your families, ensuring you get the right support when you need it. This is having a significant impact on improving the outcomes of your families, particularly those of you who are the most vulnerable. However, the centre is not provided with information to help them locate expectant

parents in order to engage them in centre services and activities and provide support early on to achieve better outcomes. Your local authority has been asked to improve this.

Your children's centre highly values your opinion and provides excellent opportunities for all of you to contribute your views and be involved in the decision making process and in developing the range of provision and services. The services and activities provided are well used by the community. More significantly, a large number of the most vulnerable and hard to reach families are accessing the centre services and activities. This is due to the centre listening to your views, using other venues in the community, employing highly skilled staff and developing very strong partnerships with a range of professionals. Provision is planned to ensure it is accessible to all. You told us you highly value the crèche provided and you also told us that older children are welcome to attend in the school holidays. This has enabled you to attend courses and access services. As a result, your children's centre meets your needs and those of your children and the wider community very well.

Your children are making good progress in relation to their starting points. However, too many children are not achieving expected levels at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Partnership working with local schools and parents and carers are not yet fully developed to ensure all involved are fully supporting children in order to improve their learning and development. Your centre has been asked to improve this.

The quality of the care, guidance and support you are offered and receive, particularly during times of crisis is exceptional. You told us 'without this centre I wouldn't meet anyone', 'I wouldn't come out of the house if it wasn't for coming to the children's centre' and 'there is always somebody there if you need help or advice'. Staff go above and beyond that expected of them to provide extremely effective personalised support for children and their families to develop their well-being across all outcomes.

Your children's centre is extremely well led and managed. The centre leader, centre staff, partners, board of governors and the advisory board are committed to the success of the children's centre in improving the lives of families living in your community. They rigorously evaluate and monitor their performance and set challenging targets for improvement to ensure the services and activities are having significant impact on the outcomes of children and their families. Your children's centre has good capacity to further improve your family's outcomes and narrow the gap between the most disadvantaged and the rest. It does so with great determination and dedication. We wish you all the very best for the future.

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