

Inspection report for The Fields Children's Centre

Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	362603
Inspection dates	6–7 October 2010
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Centre leader	Gillian October
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Linked school if applicable	Fields Children's Centre 110593
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Fields Children's Centre 110593

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.

An inspection of the maintained nursery and day care was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of the children's centre, locality manager for people who have additional needs, health visitor, speech therapist, midwife, business manager, headteacher of the nursery school, family involvement worker, outreach worker, a group of parents and carers and the Chair of the Governing Body and a member of the local authority. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Fields Children's Centre is situated in one of most deprived areas in the country and in Cambridge city. It also serves the villages of Fen Ditton, Clay Hythe, Stow-Cum-Quy and Horningsea. Much of the area immediately around the children's centre is characterised by terraced housing, low rise flats and maisonettes, high unemployment and many families are on benefits. The majority of families surrounding the children's centre are White British. The remainder are from Black African and Caribbean or eastern European and Asian groups. Most children enter day care and early education with skills that are significantly lower than those expected for their age.

The centre has a governing body which is made up of representatives from the local authority, parent governors, the Primary Care Trust, neighbourhood partners, health providers and centre staff which it shares with the nursery school and day care provision. It has evolved from a partnership between the nursery school and day care services. In 2004 it was designated a children's centre and from 2006 it has operated as an integrated centre. It provides the full core offer which includes early

education integrated with day care. It operates as an integrated centre led by the head of the centre supported by the day care coordinator, the nursery school deputy headteacher and business manager. The centre operates in one main building and other activities take place at various community venues within the reach area.

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

Fields Children’s Centre offers good support for children and families. The head of centre and all staff ensure the building is a safe and secure environment for all users. There are good procedures in place to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of everyone who uses the centre. Healthy outcomes for users and their families are good. They take part in nutrition sessions where they learn about inexpensive ways to exercise such as skipping. A free swimming session is available for users every week. Children and parents really enjoy taking part in stimulating activities such as music sessions where they learn new rhymes and move to the music.

The quality of care, guidance and support given to users is an excellent aspect of the centre’s work. Parents and carers really value the very warm and friendly welcome they always receive at the centre due to exceptionally dedicated staff. For example, one parent typically commented, ‘The centre is a brilliant support and there is always someone to talk to.’ In a recent survey, 98% of parents were satisfied with the support and guidance they receive from the centre. Case study evidence indicates that families have received really well integrated and sensitive support in times of crisis because of astute referrals made by staff. High quality guidance means that many parents and carers learn about the best ways to protect their child’s health. For example, users learn about how to prevent a child’s teeth from decaying because of discussions held with a visiting health care specialist.

Children from the reach area who attend the Early Years Foundation Stage provision make good gains in their speech and language skills as well as personal, social and emotional development. They behave exceptionally well at the centre. The happiness on their faces throughout sessions shows very clearly they enjoy coming to the

centre. Assessment records of children's stage of development indicate that outcomes are improving effectively across the reach area. Children's developmental stages when they start coming to the centre are not always recorded in detail and so it is not easy to track their progress while they attend. Although parents have access to a range of services to support them back into employment, the centre does not offer many accredited courses in for example, literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT).

The centre meets its statutory responsibilities for the promotion of equality and diversity well. It has been particularly successful in engaging specific groups of ethnic minority parents. For example, a large number of users including parents and carers who speak English as an additional language are members of the 'Toy Library' and can borrow a wide range of equipment to extend their children's skills. Recently, this has been extended to provide apparatus and materials to support the development of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The centre's self-evaluation is accurate and is based on careful monitoring and evaluation procedures. Senior leaders and governors have a clear view of the strengths and areas for development across the centre. This is reflected in a thoughtful improvement plan. Although the centre is starting to evaluate its work in relation to national and local indicators, the systems to collect data and monitor the longer-term impact are at an early stage of development. A significant improvement means that clinics to check up on each baby's health are held regularly at the centre. Users' contribution to the community is outstanding. For instance, users and local people can help each other successfully because the centre's leadership has set up the 'Time Bank', a system where local people share their expertise without using money. Good provision and outcomes, coupled with effective self-evaluation demonstrates the centres good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Record initial assessments more effectively so that all children's progress is tracked rigorously in key areas of learning.
- Improve provision for parents to develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.
- Ensure the centre collects more data and evaluates more thoroughly its longer term impact on children, parents and carers.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

The centre effectively promotes healthy eating and lifestyles. This includes the provision of freshly cooked meals and water during the day and well-integrated services. Parents typically comment that they now think carefully about how to improve their families' health, 'After the nutrition course I will be looking at food labels closely for salt and sugar levels.' Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have good access to specialist services which develop their well-being and emotional

health such as a music therapist.

The safety of all the centre's users, including those who are most vulnerable, is a high priority for the senior leadership team. Users' welfare inside and outside the centre is supported successfully. For example, 55 mums, dads and carers have successfully taken a course to learn about first aid, and parents reported that they had learnt a lot of useful techniques to keep their children and others safe. Risk assessments are used appropriately but do not regularly involve parents and carers in evaluating hazards they may face in certain situations in or out of the centre. External agencies report that the centre uses the Common Assessment Framework sensibly. Case study evidence indicates that vulnerable or looked after children and their families and carers are experiencing positive outcomes as a result of the centre's work. The centre knows the families it works with particularly well. As a result, early identification and prevention play a key role in the centre's work to reduce harm to children.

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are animated and really enjoy their time at the centre. This adds positively to their learning. As a result children make good progress. Observations of sessions demonstrate that children learn to concentrate for considerable periods of time because staff have high expectations of them. Staff carefully evaluate children's learning in sessions but they do not always use developmental guidance effectively to set specific learning objectives. Evidence gathered by the inspectors, shows that projects use woodland areas successfully to develop children's knowledge and understanding of the world. Children form extremely strong relationships with staff because they follow up on children's interests very successfully. Transition arrangements to local schools are well established and children are effectively prepared, particularly in their social skills.

Users contribute outstandingly well their views about the effectiveness of the centre through the 'Parents Forum'. In addition, users thoughtfully evaluate sessions with their children that they have attended and the centre takes positive action to improve its services. For example, parents requested and have set up an allotment group where they are growing vegetables with the support of a local expert. The centre runs a clothing exchange where users may swop unwanted children's clothes and take away items which will be useful to them. The centre is really well established and has a good reputation in the local community. It is promoting community cohesion extremely well. It is very successful at integrating parents from different age groups, backgrounds, faiths and cultures. For example, teenage parents regularly attend sessions at the centre.

Parents are encouraged successfully to improve their management skills of children, for example, a sleep clinic allows parents and carers to share their concerns and pick up advice on how handle sleep problems from a health professional. They have a good range of information, advice and guidance regarding childcare options at the centre and in the local area. Financial advice sessions are used well by parents. The 'Toy Library' means children can try out toys before parents spend money on buying

them.

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	1
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

Thorough assessment procedures are in place. Consequently, the centre knows its users well. Partnership working across all the services based at the centre is really well thought through. As a result, support for the most vulnerable families is effective and all have access to good quality day care and nursery education. The senior leadership team, with representatives from a range of agencies, meets regularly to ensure services are meeting users' needs. Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage have received training in observation and assessment skills. This means that all children who attend the crèche are rigorously assessed and provided for.

Achievement is celebrated through positive displays and individual encouragement given to parents and carers. For example, over the last three years 27 parents who are at an early stage of learning to speak English have completed courses in English. Virtually all users who attended this course have gone on to attend other sessions at the centre. Opportunities for parents and carers to develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills and qualifications are limited.

The centre provides a wide range of services and activities that meet the needs of the reach area well. It is particularly successful in engaging with fathers and working families. Saturday morning activities are popular and enable the centre to make contact with an even wider group of users. 'Messy Play' sessions effectively allow children to experience handling a rich variety of materials in a suitably equipped area. The centre keeps appropriate records of local participation rates in different activities offered.

All parents who spoke to the inspectors were positive about the centre and the impact different services have had on their families. They were extremely complimentary about the care, guidance and support they received from all staff. For example, they enjoyed being able to socialise and eat a lunch in each others' company at the centre cafe, as well as learning to cook healthy meals. One parent commented, 'There is not much I would like to change. The centre means our children and families are safe and well looked after.' Vulnerable families in particular reported that the centre is making a positive difference to their lives and the future lives of their children. Many mothers continue to breast feed their children for at least six weeks due to the excellent encouragement provided by centre staff and health care experts.

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	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?

2

Governance arrangements are secure and there are thoughtful lines of accountability in place. Members of the governing body are fully committed to improving outcomes for children and their families in the reach area. The head of centre ensures that governors are well informed about the services offered. Improvement planning is secure but one or two targets for development are not always created in ways that would assist leaders to evaluate their success easily. The school has already identified that it does not record the starting points of children who attend the centre effectively and so they are not always able to evaluate their progress in detail. All relevant partners are rigorously involved in development planning due to high expectations of the leadership. As a result of effective management and outcomes for users, value for money is good.

Highly committed leadership is provided by the head of the centre and her senior team. As a result, staff are enthusiastic and morale is high. The centre runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis, and the well-being of all users is a key priority. The head of centre has developed robust systems and procedures to ensure that provision is fully integrated. The centre knows itself well and self-evaluation is rigorous. Users' views are regularly sought and significantly influence services provided by the centre. Records are not effectively developed of how the centre

improves outcomes for users and so staff can not fully evaluate trends over time.

Resources are well managed and carefully targeted towards users with the greatest needs. The accommodation for the Early Years Foundation Stage is generous in size and includes a satisfactory outdoor area. The centre is well-maintained and health and safety issues are quickly sorted out. It keeps detailed files containing information on for example, staff qualifications. Records indicate that all staff working at the centre have been subject to an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check.

Collaborative working is a significant strength of the centre's work. Centre staff are pro-active in sharing information. Inter-agency working is really well established and is successful in identifying those families and children who are at greatest risk. The centre's child protection policy and guidelines are robust and all staff have been fully trained at the appropriate level in child protection procedures. Protocols and practices for referrals are well known by staff and are high priorities for everyone at the centre. Succinct and clear policies on safeguarding have been shared with users for handling babies' feeding bottles and weaning but this has not been consistently achieved with regard to general safeguarding arrangements.

The centre meets all the requirements with regard to promoting equality and diversity and tackling discrimination. Staff are committed to promoting the inclusion of all families within the reach area. The centre gathers valuable information about the different user groups and evaluates their engagement. For example, case study evidence indicates the centre has been effective in working with children and parents who are new to the area and from ethnic minority groups. Children with disabilities are well provided for both in the physical accessibility of the building and by access to appropriate professional support.

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	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	2

and activities	
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

Inspection report for early years provisions Children’s Centre 110593.

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 *Fields Children's Centre* on 6–7 October 2010. We judged the centre as good overall.

Thank you for helping us to find out about your children’s centre. We enjoyed talking to some of you.

Your children make good progress in their learning and behave extremely well at the centre. It helps to prepare your children successfully for the next stage of education. You and your children are encouraged effectively to lead healthy lives.

You and your children really enjoy and value the centre and the support it provides. We heard you like having lunch in the cafe and appreciate ‘Messy Sessions’ where your children can explore a wide variety of materials in a suitable place. The toy library and clothing swop are popular resources.

Through the work that the staff do, you and your children are guided extremely well. This means that you and your children learn to keep safe effectively. Several of you told us how well staff care for you and you really appreciate the thoughtful way they listen to you. The staff work closely with other agencies to make sure that you are put in touch with others who can give you the right help and support.

The centre welcomes people from all backgrounds well and treats everyone equally fairly. Your head of centre and senior staff have good ideas about ways to improve the centre. You told us staff are always looking for exciting ways to improve the centre. It conducts regular surveys to find out what you are happy with and less pleased. The centre responds well to your requests and has added extra sessions at times which suit you best.

We have asked the head of centre and senior staff to look at how they can make things even better. The most important things are to.

- Ensure staff watch over your children's progress in key areas of learning even more carefully.
- Provide more opportunities for you to participate in courses to develop your literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills.
- Develop a system to check how well the centre is doing over longer periods of time.

It was a real pleasure to meet you and your children. I hope you continue to flourish and enjoy your time at the Fields Children's Centre.

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