

Inspection report for Gladstone Children's Centre

Local authority	Peterborough
Inspection number	367803
Inspection dates	8–9 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Marianick Ellender-Gelé HMI

Centre governance	Peterborough City Council
Centre leader	Barbara Kirby
Date of previous inspection	N/A
Centre address	The Veranda Family Centre
	927 Bourges Boulevard
	Peterborough
	PE1 2AN
Telephone number	01733 777840
Fax number	01733 703588
Email address	barbara.kirby@cpft.nhs.uk

Linked school if applicable	N/A
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Tiny Tots Crèche (EY395384) St Joseph Day Nursery (URN 256824)

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

Introduction

The inspection addresses the centre's contribution to:

- facilitating access to early childhood services by parents, prospective parents and young children
- maximising the benefit of those services to parents, prospective parents and young children
- improving the well-being of young children.

The report is made to the local authority and a copy is sent to the children's centre. The local authority may send the report to such persons it considers appropriate and must arrange for an action plan to be produced in relation to the findings in this report.

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with staff and senior managers from the centre, parents, members of the advisory board and a local authority representative. Inspectors met with a number of partners including Early Years Foundation Stage partners, representatives from health services, the Gladstone Community Association, the Pakistani Community Association and a member of staff from the local Family Assessment Centre (Marcus House). Inspectors also met the headteachers of the two local primary schools, one of whom is the chair of the advisory board. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Gladstone Children's Centre serves the central area of Peterborough. It is located on two sites, the Veranda Centre and the Allama Iqbal Centre. The area is one of high social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of children who are living in households where no one is working is above the national average and the weekly average wage is well below the national figure. Free school meal eligibility for children attending local schools is above the national average. The proportion of children with a disability is above average. A sensory room is available on one of the two sites for children with complex physical and mental needs. The Aiming High parents' group, established at this centre, is now used as the main forum for Peterborough City Council to engage with parents and carers of children who have a disability.

The local population is mixed. It was in the past predominantly of Pakistani Muslim heritage, with most families having lived in the area over two or three generations. A number of Portuguese economic migrants also came to the area in the 1990s. More recently, however, diversity is increasing and the proportion of Pakistani children is now much lower. Families come from an increasingly wide range of backgrounds,

such as from the African continent and Eastern Europe. Those registering at the centre in 2010 recorded 16 different languages as their mother tongue. Several members of staff are bilingual in the languages used in the community. There are small numbers of White British families. Although improving, the children's levels of language and communication skills are lower than are typical for their age when they start school.

The centre works with a number of partners to provide health services and other family support services. Early years provision is available in several local preschools, two of which are located within the centre buildings. Access to day care is primarily through a local private provider (St Joseph's Day Nursery). Parents can easily access training and vocational learning courses through the Gladstone Community Association where a crèche is provided by the children centre staff. Staff provide advice and guidance to users about other services locally, including on housing matters. The families living temporarily at a nearby residential Family Assessment Centre (Marcus House) attend the children's centre regularly with their key workers.

Gladstone Children's Centre is provided through a Service Level Agreement with the Cambridge and Peterborough Foundation Trust which employs the centre staff. The centre is governed by Peterborough City Council to whom it is accountable for its effectiveness. An advisory board advises the centre's staff on the type of services to offer the 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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

On a day-to-day basis, activities run smoothly. Satisfactory outcomes for children and families are underpinned by the satisfactory provision. The centre is doing good work with individual families. It ensures that the various services operating from the centre are brought together to support families and their children in a timely manner. The work done to help parents of children who have a disability is very good. Parents and carers feel comfortable in the centre and know they will get a warm welcome from the staff. Users told inspectors: 'We don't want to miss a single session' and 'This is a very friendly place to be'. The centre's approach to safeguarding the well-being and

safety of users ensures that all are aware of the need to be vigilant. The understanding of the diverse cultural and religious needs of the community is a strength. The high level of commitment of the centre's staff to improving the services for the community they serve is in no doubt, and teamwork is strong. The level of outreach work in the community is satisfactory. The service delivery manager ensures that sufficient numbers of activities are provided directly by centre staff and currently the range of provision is also satisfactory. Participation rates are rising and users broadly reflect the social and ethnic mix found in the community. However, some sessions have had to be stopped due to low attendance and some groups do not use the centre as much as they could. One mother said that she did not know the centre existed. She was very pleased to be able to access the health services locally. Partnerships with local providers, such as schools, pre-schools, childminders and adult learning providers are underdeveloped. The centre promotes equal access for all very well. However, some families from non-Asian backgrounds, are not engaged and remain isolated.

Staff seek the views of parents and carers to help them evaluate which services are meeting their needs. This feedback gives the staff a general view of what needs to be improved. However, parents said that they do not know who represents them on the advisory board and they are unsure about its role and purpose. There is currently no parents' forum. Consequently, the role of parents, carers and service users in influencing decisions about the centre's development is limited. The advisory board has yet to demonstrate that it functions effectively in supporting and holding the centre to account for its work. The role and responsibility of the local authority are not clear. The data provided by the local authority are not readily accessible or understood, and self-evaluation processes are not as sharp as they could be. Some analysis has been conducted, but it is not used rigorously to evaluate successes and set ambitious targets for improvement. The action plan demonstrates good understanding of the long-established Asian community but the make-up and specific needs of hard-to-reach groups, including local White British parents and carers, and families from Eastern Europe or the African continent, are less well articulated.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should:
 - support the centre in understanding and using up-to-date information about the area it serves.
- The advisory board should:
 - strengthen its role in holding the centre to account for its effectiveness and in setting targets for its development.
- The centre should:
 - develop systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of its work
 - use data more effectively to reach families that would benefit from its services

- improve further its partnership with local providers such as childminders, schools, pre-school settings and adult learning providers.

How good are outcomes for users?

3

The outcomes for parents, carers and families who use the centre are satisfactory, and the numbers coming to sessions are growing. Parents and carers appreciate the support they receive and say that they feel comfortable and safe. Various training sessions on safety have resulted in families understanding how to check their homes, but the centre has not monitored the take-up of the safety equipment and its use in the home has been limited. The centre is effective at supporting the social and emotional needs of children and families who might become vulnerable due to particular circumstances at specific times in their life. The service delivery manager is an experienced social worker and the weekly multi-agency panel that she chairs to review the needs and progress of specific families is effective. There is valuable support to help parents, carers and extended family members communicate, play and learn more effectively with their children. Safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and parents and carers are clear about the safe and healthy practice expected when they bring their children to the centre. Not enough is done to ensure that, as far as is realistically possible, children and families who do not attend the centre are also safe and protected.

Partnerships with health professionals are good. The subtle sensitivity with which professional staff approach health issues, such as disability or genetic concerns due to consanguinity, is a strength. Figures for breastfeeding at birth are good. The sharing of information with health visitors helps in the day-to-day planning of services but formal evaluation and data are not used enough to evaluate impact of provision over time. For example, obesity issues in specific families have been identified and addressed well on a case-by-case basis. However, obesity figures are not used well enough to track obesity levels that are rising as children get older. The fathers' worker is using his local knowledge and attendance at the local mosque effectively to encourage fathers to adopt more healthy lifestyles, such as stopping smoking. The Aiming High group is an excellent forum for parents and carers of children who have a disability.

Parents and carers enjoy the opportunity to meet others and to get informal support and advice. In the 'messy play' session, children enjoyed playing with the variety of textures and equipment. The opportunities for the centre staff to model effective play approaches and relationships are well chosen. There is evidence that children make good progress as a result of coming to the centre. The two pre-schools, recently inspected, were judged to be good. Children's progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage remains below average on entry to primary school but it is improving. There is good emphasis on developing parents' skills to support children's learning. The 'rhyme time' and 'big book' reading engage all those present and parents said that, as a result of these sessions, they had gained confidence in reading with their children at home. One mother who lacked confidence in speaking English said that she was more able to stimulate her child's learning generally. It is difficult for the centre to track longer-term learning outcomes for parents. There is

access to a range of vocational and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses at the Gladstone Community Association, but the children's centre does not monitor the achievement of parents and carers who follow these courses and is unsure of numbers gaining more educational qualifications. Overall, the views of parents do not inform provision sufficiently well. Parents said that they would like even more training for staff on disability so that they could feel confident to bring their disabled child to some of the sessions. They also said that they would like access to numeracy courses but they did not know that two parents were acting as their representative on the advisory board and that they could make recommendations for improvement to the board.

Jobcentre Plus has, in the past, provided sessions at the centre but take-up was low. Much of the work to promote economic well-being is done at Gladstone Community Association where parents and carers are given helpful guidance on writing CVs and provided with a wide range of information about adult learning. The Pakistani Community Association provides useful courses, for example, on developing information and communication technology skills. Work placements through Peterborough City Council and the volunteer service offer opportunities for adults to get work. The protocol for sharing information between Gladstone Community Association and the children's centre is not formalised. It is, therefore, difficult for the centre to track the impact of their advice on the number of adults who go on to further training or employment. The centre provides effective support on how to apply for benefits and deal with housing issues. One parent of disabled children said: 'They've been fantastic! I did not even know what benefit and resource I was allowed to get for my children; they explained it all for me.'

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	3
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	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	3

How good is the provision?

3

Significant reorganisation issues in the local authority affected the centre in the past year and more changes are planned for the coming year. However, the service

delivery manager and her team have managed these changes effectively and maintained a provision of satisfactory quality and range. Systems for assessing the needs of the children and families who use the centre are secure and the needs of most families are known and understood. Effective contact between partners means that individual families are offered well-targeted support and care, which one mother summed up by saying, 'This centre and its people are my family.' Several case studies also tell of the centre's significant success in meeting the specific needs of individual mothers, fathers and their children, including those of Marcus House. Relevant agencies work hard to advise parents and carers about other services, such as the legal immigration service, Women's Aid for domestic violence and voluntary charity organisations. The centre acts as host to meetings of professionals and parents when children are assessed under the Common Assessment Framework.

The centre knows that the assessment of recently arrived groups from Eastern Europe and African countries is underdeveloped. The centre does have access to some data on the local area but the way such information is collated and shared requires improvement to make it easier for the centre to identify needs rapidly and, in turn, modify the sessions on offer. Partners and centre staff have introduced special sessions to improve their offer to Lithuanian and Czech Roma families in the area.

The number of users attending sessions is improving, but participation and attendance in some activities remain inconsistent. The centre has investigated why this is happening and stopped some initiatives to ensure satisfactory value for money. The members of staff give unstintingly of their time to advertise the work of the centre, such as leaflet dropping in their own time at weekends and using community and faith groups. Professionals sometimes miss opportunities to meet users, such as those provided through the local pre-schools and primary schools.

Many parents, carers and users are happy with the service they receive. The centre conducts consultation exercises and takes account of users' satisfaction levels when planning future sessions. Initiatives such as volunteering opportunities and mini-book library are leading to improved parenting skills and increasing parents' and carers' confidence in helping children's learning at home. However, assessment of the long-term impact of play-based activities on the achievement of children is yet to be embedded and there is little to demonstrate how parents have built on what they have learnt. While professionals implicitly wish to raise aspiration, this is not promoted sufficiently well in reality. The centre does not have strategies in place to judge the impact of vocational courses on the long-term economic future of families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities	3

meet the needs of users and the wider community	
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

Day-to-day management is well organised, professional supervision is conducted regularly and staff have a clear understanding of their work. Staff are very committed to the community they serve and to improving the services they offer. They work well as a team and are flexible, helping each other when necessary. Many professionals have had direct experience of some of the challenges encountered by families, for example, when they themselves settled in England. They understand how the different generations have different expectations. The members of staff who are bilingual deal particularly sensitively with deep-rooted cultural practice, such as gender roles, forced marriages and honour-based behaviours. The senior managers know what they need to improve and priorities are identified. However, the centre's action plan lacks clear criteria by which success can be measured in terms of impact on users. The quality of the information used does not always enable staff to target its support to specific issues, such as helping families move out of poverty and accessing those who might be isolated and not accessing the centre.

The advisory board, in partnership with the local authority, is not sufficiently involved in setting targets to drive improvement, and systems for accountability are not sufficiently robust. The chair recognises that the functions of the advisory board and its relationship with the local authority are not clear. As part of her study for a national professional qualification, the service delivery manager has recently reviewed processes for the board's meetings. Currently, the membership of the board does not represent fully the many backgrounds of the community and most parents are unclear about its purpose or how their voice can be heard.

Members of staff, on the two sites, are very welcoming and accommodation is well maintained, bright and accessible to all. Partners, parents and carers say that staff are friendly and accommodating. Resources are looked after well, and toys and books are of good quality. There are examples of services being withdrawn if they are not popular in order to secure satisfactory value for money. Nonetheless, the sensory room is currently underused. Collaborative working with the health services is good but more needs to be done to engage with other partners, such as providers of vocational and adult learning, childminders, schools and pre-school settings, to improve further the formal evaluation of the centre's effectiveness and inform further improvement. All families surveyed think that the outdoor trips offer very good value for money.

Good strategies to narrow the achievement gap and develop social skills include 'little wrigglers' for babies and 'sticky fingers' for children at pre-school. There are some excellent opportunities for outings and summer activities for families. Many mothers said that they can rarely leave the area, especially those who have children with a disability, and one said that her daughter is 'speechless with excitement' on these

outings. The centre is very sensitive to equality and diversity issues. For example, the scheduling of outings is timed so as not clash with Ramadan and staff take part in community events to meet fathers because few attend the centre. Some sessions are targeted at particular groups, for example the Portuguese and Roma Slovakian families, to encourage their attendance at the centre. A café was just being started at the time of this inspection and it is too early to judge its impact.

Policies on child protection are clearly understood by staff who are confident in their knowledge of what to do if they have a concern. The service delivery manager has regular training for her role as the designated member of staff for safeguarding and child protection. The centre undertakes all necessary checks on staff during recruitment and obtains assurance from partners that their staff have had appropriate clearance. The service delivery manager has recognised that, despite not being statutory, a single central record of staff recruitment checks is good practice and would make her management of safeguarding more effective. The staff contribute effectively to core meetings held by social care services and facilitate meetings of professionals to ensure that multi-agency support is coordinated to meet the needs of individual children and their families. Particularly excellent examples were given of successful early intervention to support families with severe mental, emotional well-being and safety needs.

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	3
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	3
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	3
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	3
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

Inspectors looked at the inspection outcomes for Gladstone Park Pre-school (EY256765) inspected on 7 June 2011 and Beeches Pre-school (EY267088) inspected in January 2011. The reports show that children make good progress in all areas of learning. Inspectors also considered the published reports of the two local primary schools.

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 Gladstone Children's Centre on 8 and 9 June 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

During the inspection, we held meetings with the centre's staff and some of the other people who work from the centre. We were pleased to be able to talk to some of you about the centre and the activities it provides for you. I would like to thank the people who came to the centre specially to meet with us. We took account of the views of all the people we met when we made our judgements about the centre. We also looked at the surveys that you had completed for the centre about the sessions you attend.

Many of you told us that you appreciate the support you receive at the centre. You say that you feel comfortable and safe there. We agree with you when you say that the staff offer a warm welcome to people attending sessions and are always ready with leaflets of advice about where you can get the help you need. The centre is doing some good work with individual families who benefit from the satisfactory partnership working of the various services that operate from the centre. The centre tries to put on activities for different groups of people. There is now a group especially for parents of children who have a disability, and extended family members are always welcomed at the centre. The centre does not always have contact with all other families in the community who might need their help and support, and we have recommended that staff try to see if these groups could be better supported.

We heard about the training sessions on safety in the home that some of you have attended in the past. We also know that you can be provided with equipment to ensure that your home is safe. But the centre does not know how many of you took

this opportunity. There are other things that the centre is not too sure about because the information and data they hold are not in an easy format to use or analyse. The centre helps you to support your children in their learning, communication and social skills. We heard about several initiatives, such as 'little wrigglers', 'sticky fingers' and 'rhyme time', all helping you to understand how your children learn and develop. The mothers at the Aiming High group are very pleased with the opportunities offered to them for sharing ideas and concerns over their children's development. We saw that you enjoy the opportunity to meet with others and to get informal support and advice at some of the groups. In the 'messy play' session, we could observe you and your children playing very well with the wide range of textures on tables and the equipment provided around the room.

Health services are good and continue to be provided in the community. We know that the centre made some changes last year and that some sessions had to be stopped because of low attendance. The sensory room is not used very much. We think that staff need to persevere and they are hoping that more families will take up services. This team is keen to do the very best for all families and they hope that if you have just arrived in the area you will want to join in.

We have asked the managers to find different ways of checking how well they are doing and what difference they are making to your lives, both in the short term and in the long term. It is difficult for the centre to find out how well adults do if they go on to gain other qualifications or go back to work. When they have better information, we think they will be better able to plan for the future and ensure that they provide for some of the people that are not yet using the centre. To help them do this, the centre staff need easy access to up-to-date information about the community and about the needs of the people in it. So, we have asked the council to help them understand this information and give the centre some direction and focus to their planning.

Staff ask you what you like about the centre and listen to your views when they think about what activities to put on. However, the parents we spoke to did not know that two parents are on the advisory board and can represent your views. Parents told us that they did not know what the advisory board does. This is a group of people who meet to discuss how well the centre is doing and how it should develop. Its role is unclear and it is not yet working in the way it should. So we have suggested that it needs to be stronger in the way it works.

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