

Inspection report for Gorton South Children's Centre Mount Road

Local authority	Manchester
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Reporting inspector	Tim Bristow HMI

Centre governance	Local authority
Centre leader	Angela Platt
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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.

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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 representatives from the local authority, centre staff, representatives from the advisory board, representatives from services that work in partnership with the centre and users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

This is a phase one children's centre designated in 2006 and providing the core offer to the ward of Gorton South in Manchester. The centre serves one of the 30% most deprived parts in the country. The centre works closely with Kidspiration which is a private nursery and subject to separate inspection arrangements. There is childcare provision on the Gorton South Children's Centre Sacred Heart Site. Children from the reach area attend this provision. The centre provides a range of services, designed to support families and young children in partnership with Gorton South Children's Centre Sacred Heart Site and Gorton North Children's Centre St James Site. Between September 2010 and June 2011 the centre was closed for refurbishment and the services it previously offered on-site were provided by the other two centres in the partnership. The centre is managed by a centre manager who is also on the leadership team of the other two centres and is accountable to Manchester local authority for the delivery of services within the centre. There is also an advisory board shared by the three centres that represents users and service partners.

Traditionally the large majority of the local population has been White British. However, in recent years the area has experienced inward migration from Black minority-ethnic groups mainly from within the United Kingdom. There has also been inward migration from the European Union and further afield, including Romanian Roma families, asylum seekers and refugees. The Pakistani population is the largest minority-ethnic group.

The rate of teenage pregnancy is well above the average for the rest of the city. Most children enter the childcare and nursery provision with knowledge and skills that are below those typically expected for their age.

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

The overall effectiveness of the centre is satisfactory. Outcomes for users overall within the Gorton South reach area are also satisfactory. However, there are services offered that have resulted in good outcomes for users' safety and welfare, such as those provided to families whose circumstances make them vulnerable, by the family support and outreach workers. The behaviour of children in all settings associated with the centre and those involved in the centre activities, such as the 'Stay and Play' is good. The contribution to the governance of the centre and the extent of voluntary work by users are limited. There are families and children in the community who are not yet taking advantage of the universal services on offer.

While provision overall is satisfactory, the care, guidance and support for users are good. As one user reported, 'There is no where else you can go to that offers the same high level of advice and support.' This is underpinned by good procedures to safeguard children and other users. All the parents and carers spoken to, such as the young parents group, were very happy and secure about the welcome and care that they receive in the centre. The procedures for assessing the needs of the users and then providing the appropriate services are satisfactory. While they are most effective at assessing the needs of the most vulnerable families to ensure their health, safety and financial security, they are less effective at assessing the steps that users need to take to embark on employment or voluntary work.

Procedures for safeguarding users and vetting the suitability of staff are robust. Staff are well trained with regard to ensuring the health and safety of centre users. A particular strength of the centre is in its safeguarding of especially vulnerable families. For example, the swift response to address specific needs when they are identified reduces the safeguarding risks to these families. Equality of opportunity for users is satisfactory overall.

The centre can demonstrate the impact of services and activities upon the well-being of users. This is particularly the case for young parents, and their children, that engage with the centre.

Governance and leadership of the centre are satisfactory. The centre's development plan demonstrates a good understanding of the needs of children and their families within the reach area and the steps required to improve their well-being. However, the criteria for measuring how successfully the centre fulfils these priorities are not precise. They are insufficiently focused to fully evaluate its effectiveness or for the local authority to hold leaders to account for their work. The centre advisory board provides an effective forum for participants to gain an understanding of the work of a range of services. However, its impact on overseeing the strategic development of the centre is limited.

The centre coordinator and other leaders demonstrate a passion and determination to improve the lives of users. This has been a challenging period for the centre and its users because of its closure for refurbishment. Effective partnerships with the other two centres have ensured that the services for users have been adequately maintained. Regular supervision of centre workers, and the evaluation of their impact, has resulted in services for families most susceptible to risk to be of a high quality. However, this has not been the case for all other activities where often the evaluation has had little impact on shaping wider services to meet the needs of users, or in measuring the success of the activity in meeting local priorities. Consequently, the centre demonstrates a satisfactory capacity for improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that more adult users are involved in the advisory board of the centre and are enabled to become volunteers in the community.
- Increase the participation rate of families and children in centre services and activities.
- Improve the governance and leadership of the centre by:
 - ensuring that the success criteria in the development plan are measurable and achievable so that centre leaders can be held to account for their work
 - strengthening the role of the advisory board.
- Strengthen evaluation procedures so that the centre:
 - can better demonstrate how its activities are meeting local priorities
 - activities are refined to meet the needs of target groups more successfully
 - is better able to demonstrate clearly the impact of activities on its users.

How good are outcomes for users?

Activities such as those provided in partnership with the children and parents service are having a marked impact on the mental health of adult users and the behaviour of their children. Services provided in partnership with the health authority ensure that user groups, such as teenage parents, are well cared for. Users gain great benefit from activities such as the baby massage class that has been restarted in the centre.

The most vulnerable children, particularly those with child-protection plans, and their families, are supported very effectively by the centre and partner services, such as health, social services and housing. The evaluations of user views undertaken by centre staff show that the lives of these families are greatly improved through the support from centre workers and the Common Assessment Framework procedures. Parents and their children engage with the centre services confidently as a result of this support. As one parent reported, 'If it wasn't for my outreach worker I would be in darkness.' The centre is recognised as a place of safety by users. For example, partner services staff regularly arrange to meet users in the centre because they feel secure in the setting.

The overall outcomes for children in all the settings supported by the centre are at least satisfactory. Assessment information shows that by the time children enter Key Stage 1 the gap has been narrowed between their skill development and that typically expected. One stronger feature is their behaviour. Children are happy, engaged and play cooperatively. There are a number of adult users that embark on courses, such as the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) course. Attendance is high, but few users then undertake training in colleges or go on to paid employment because links with employment agencies are less effective than they could be.

Users are regularly asked to evaluate the services that they experience. However, limited use is made of these evaluations to shape future activities. The centre has recently recruited a few users to embark on voluntary work. They have benefitted from training and have had the necessary safeguarding checks.

The centre takes effective action to ensure the financial stability of its users. For example, in partnership with other services, they have ensured that the local Romanian Roma community are able to access the financial benefits to which they were entitled. This had a marked impact on improving attendance at school as it reduced the rate of begging by children during times when they should have been at school.

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	3
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	3

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

Assessment procedures are used well by family support workers to encourage families, particularly those that are most vulnerable, to request the services that are needed to ensure their safety and well-being. These are then tailored effectively to meet their individual needs. The centre successfully nurtures and fosters confidence and skills for some users so that barriers of isolation in the home are broken down and they can become better parents. For example, one user, who initially lacked confidence, reported that without the centre, 'I would be lost.' She also reported that the centre had helped her to better understand her child's behaviour. For others that engage in the centre services, for example, young parents and carers, the assessment of their participation in some activities is not yet sufficiently useful in identifying the next steps they could take to further improve their social and economic well-being. As a result, assessment procedures are satisfactory overall.

The centre has a successful track record at facilitating the effectiveness of services, such as those linked to health. However, the links between different services are not sufficiently integrated so that the centre can demonstrate a concerted approach to achieving improvements to local priorities, such as in the improvements necessary to dental health or breastfeeding that have been identified. Partners such as childminders and other local early years' providers have improved their provision as a result of links with the centre. For example, staff from one setting have improved their skills in assessing children's progress and developing their literacy and numeracy skills because of the effective advice and training offered by the centre teacher. One childminder reported that, 'At my last inspection I was judged to be outstanding as a result of the support and advice from the centre.'

All staff help to provide a welcoming and secure environment in the centre. This starts from first contact with the well-trained reception staff. Users report that the non-judgemental approach to their needs and the friendly encouragement that they have encountered has quickly helped to overcome their lack of confidence and personal difficulties so that they are able to benefit from the services on offer. Activities such as the 'Stay and Play' are used very effectively by centre staff to help parents and carers in the nurturing of their children.

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 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?

3

There are examples of some good evaluations undertaken that have helped to make improvements in services, as in the case of centre staff and partner agencies being successful in engaging effectively with, and improving the lives of, Romanian Roma families. This group had been a particularly hard to reach community. Careful evaluation of the activities and services offered to them ensured that they were appropriate to meet their specific needs. However, there are some weaknesses in the evaluation procedures which prevent the centre from improving services sufficiently to raise participation rates, which would better enable them to achieve locally identified priorities. For example, in a speech and language activity, the attendance of targeted children and their families was low. The centre leaders have not done enough to evaluate why this was the case.

The centre has experienced many changes recently. For example, the reorganisation of the provision to support children that are disabled, changes in leadership at its partner children's centres, new line managers and changes to leaders of partner services, such as health. Throughout this period the centre leader has effectively ensured that the vital services to support the most vulnerable in the community have been maintained. She has rightly identified the need to re-establish the good links with the community that were apparent before the centre closure for refurbishment. One recent very successful activity to engage with the community in order to combat discrimination and improve community cohesion was the food fair facilitated by the centre that was very well attended. Food from the minority-ethnic groups represented in the community was well celebrated. As a result barriers between the differing communities are starting to break down.

Procedures for health and safety and vetting the suitability of staff are robust. Staff are well trained in safeguarding procedures. A particular strength of the centre is in its safeguarding of families whose circumstances make them particular vulnerable. The promotion of equality of opportunity for users is satisfactory and the centre can demonstrate that once families are engaged in its work it does lead to improvements to their well-being. This is particularly the case for young parents and the small proportion of families who have children with disabilities.

With many aspects of the provision, including outcomes, being of a satisfactory standard and management being able to identify key areas for improvement but recognising that further work is required to make these effective, the centre currently provides satisfactory value for money.

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	3
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	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

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 Gorton South Children's Centre Mount Road Centre on 26 to 27 July 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We would like to thank those of you who spoke to us. Your views were very helpful to the inspection. The range of services and activities on offer is helping you to improve your parenting skills and enabling some of you to train and improve your chances for employment. Those of you who are experiencing difficulty in your lives are well supported to keep your families and children safe and healthy. Coming to the centre has helped you to overcome feelings of isolation and has boosted your confidence. We watched you thoroughly enjoying the activities, such as the 'Play and Stay' and the baby massage, where you talked to each other and played with your children. Very few of you have volunteered to help in the centre or local community, and the centre would welcome your support. Currently, few of you are part of the centre's advisory board. It is very important that more

of you are so that you can help to ensure that the centre offers services that are appropriate to all users.

You told us that one reason why you like coming to the centre is because of the helpful and friendly staff who work there, and we agree that this is an accurate description of the team. They try their best to help you to make improvements to your lives. For example, the outreach workers work well with other agencies like the health service and social services to make sure that the help provided is appropriate for you and your families. The health services at the centres are well attended and are effective in keeping individual children and parents healthy. The courses that some of you attend to improve your skills, such as the ESOL course, are equipping you well to embark on future training or employment. The centre does not yet do enough to encourage more people to embark on activities or take advantage of its services. The centre has helped childminders and other providers of child care in the area to make improvements that your children are now benefiting from. We were particularly impressed by the good behaviour of children when playing together.

The centre has a development plan which shows where it could improve the quality of its services. It does not yet clearly show how they will know when they have been successful in achieving these improvements. It is therefore difficult for the centre to show how its activities and services are making improvements to the lives of all the families in the reach area. The advisory board gives partner agencies and services an opportunity to meet and discuss the services they provide. However, their role is not clear, which means that at this time they do not have as much of an influence on the centre's work as they could. While the centre is good at checking that its services meet the needs of those of you who may be experiencing difficulties, it is not as good at ensuring that, for others, all its services are as effective.

The centre leaders have been successful in safeguarding the families that use the centre. They show that they know well the different groups in the community that could benefit from the centre's help. Leaders do not yet check well enough how the activities on offer are leading to improvements, both for you, but also for the community overall.

We have asked the centre to make some improvements by:

- encouraging more of you to be volunteers and to be members of the advisory board
- ensuring that all families in the area that could access and benefit from the centre services do so
- sharpening up the development plan so it is easier to check the improvements being made
- making sure the advisory board's role is clear so that it can have a greater influence on the centre's work

- keeping a better check on its activities so that it can improve them where necessary and, also, so that it can demonstrate that the activities are fit for purpose in helping it meet its targets for improvement.

Many thanks again for making us feel so welcome and we wish you and your families a successful future.

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