

Inspection report for Springfield Children's Centre

Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	383548
Inspection dates	11–12 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Graham Sims

Centre leader	Angie King
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Centre address	The Springfield Centre Springfield Road Birmingham B13 9NY
Telephone number	0121 777 2722
Fax number	0121 325 5358
Email address	a.king@springfieldproject.org.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Mini Springers Nursery

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



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100080.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No.100080

© Crown copyright 2011



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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with: trustees, the centre leader, the senior leadership team, family support staff, early years staff, partners who provide services at the centre, and parents and carers who use the centre.

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

Information about the centre

The Springfield Project, based in St Christopher's Church, started in May 1999 to provide community services in the area of Springfield, Birmingham. In March 2008, The Springfield Project went into partnership with Birmingham City Council to create a phase two children's centre in a new purpose-built building on the site of the former church hall. The local authority has commissioned the trustees of The Springfield Project to manage the children's centre. The head of centre is responsible for managing the co-located Mini Springers Nursery and the many activities which are run by around 40 full- and part-time staff and a similar-sized team of volunteers.

The centre provides the full core offer of children's centre services. The nursery, which is inspected separately, provides morning and afternoon sessions for 51 three- and four-year-olds. Parents requiring day care for younger children are signposted to other providers. The 'Seedlings' 'Stay and Play' group, run entirely by volunteers on three mornings a week, is the mainstay of the centre which offers a wide range of health-related and educational activities and one-to-one support for individuals and families.

Over half of the local population comes from a rural Pakistani heritage, and many other nationalities live in the area, where there is significant deprivation. Half of the adults in the area have qualifications lower than NVQ level 2. The unemployment rate is above the average for Birmingham and significantly above the national

average. Over half of the children under the age of five live in households claiming out-of-work benefits. A large majority of children come from families where English is a second language.

Evidence indicates that children’s skills, knowledge and abilities are well below those expected for their age when they enter the nursery or other local Early Years Foundation Stage settings.

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 families

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

This outstanding children’s centre is a wonderful example of what can be achieved when the shared vision, faith and commitment of many people combine to serve the local community. The Springfield Project has become a driving force to get people from different backgrounds and different faiths within the local community to work together to improve the lives of families and children. Its success is seen in many ways. Over 90% of the families who have children under the age of five use the centre’s services. When The Springfield Project celebrated its tenth anniversary in July 2010, over 1,000 people came to acknowledge and celebrate its contribution to the local community. Three mornings a week, a group of volunteers from the church and other helpers run the ‘Seedlings’ group for parents, carers and young children. The sessions, which take over the whole of the main body of the church adjoining the children’s centre, are always full, people arriving well in advance of the start time to secure a place. Last year, 356 families accessed these sessions, which serve as a springboard into the many other services which the centre offers.

In every area of its work, the centre is having a major impact on the lives of families and children. Through its excellent understanding of the area, through listening to parents and carers, and by making excellent use of available data, the centre is very good at identifying areas of need and finding solutions. For example, the first of its courses to tackle the problems of childhood obesity has seen a marked improvement in health outcomes. Another 12-week programme, now running for the seventh time, has seen major improvements in children’s behaviour. Targeted work with vulnerable families has seen the number of children subject to a child protection plan fall

considerably. Many adults take the first steps in learning to speak English as an additional language through the centre's courses. In a six-month period, 380 families have benefited from help and advice provided at weekly drop-in sessions, resulting in improved relationships, more stable economic circumstances and other beneficial outcomes for their families.

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. Large numbers of parents respond to surveys and consultations. Almost all speak very highly of the support they receive and feel that the centre not only listens to their concerns but understands what to do about them. Parents' views have a major impact on shaping the services provided by the centre, and courses and activities are amended to meet the needs of participants. The range of services is extensive and covers every conceivable need; indeed, if there is a need, the centre will endeavour to meet it. The centre identifies those living in the most deprived areas and those who are hard to reach, and is tireless, and highly successful, in drawing them into the centre's activities.

The centre has the capacity to deal with so many families and such diverse needs because it fosters excellent relationships with a very wide range of partners from health services, adult education establishments, local services and schools, national charities and other organisations providing support and advice. Another major factor is the astonishing number of volunteers who give of their time to run activities and to befriend families. There are so many that the centre now employs someone to coordinate the work of the volunteers. The overall quality of the services provided by the centre is outstanding. With the impact it is having on the lives of so many people, the centre shows an outstanding commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity.

The leadership provided by the trustees, the head of centre and senior leaders is outstanding. They refuse to give up, even when services are threatened by financial cutbacks. They look for creative solutions and have plans for ambitious projects for the future. Priorities for action, based on an astute analysis of need, are articulated and communicated clearly so that all can contribute to meeting them. The centre demonstrates an outstanding capacity for further improvement. Every activity is evaluated through feedback from organisers and participants, findings are used to improve future provision and there is a constant drive for improvement. The inspectors identified a few development points for the centre which are relative: a little more rigour in monitoring the quality of some of the services provided; slightly sharper evaluation of its work; analysis of the longer-term impact of some of its initiatives; more refined methods of collating information from a range of sources. These refinements are to extend what is already an outstanding awareness of what needs to be done, outstanding provision and profound impact on the lives and families within the community of Springfield.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Refine the procedures for monitoring the quality of the centre's activities, develop more efficient ways of collating information, and sharpen the evaluation and analysis of the long-term impact of the centre's services.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

The centre is acutely aware of the health and safety issues facing many families and works energetically to bring improvement. Last year, it successfully engaged every first-time and many second-time mothers in a range of ante- and postnatal services. Retrospective evaluations show that every single mother who participated in these services said that the centre's input helped them with birth and with the care of the new baby and enabled them to feel more confident as a parent. Teenage pregnancy rates are low. Breastfeeding rates are above average and increasing. Immunisation rates and the distribution of vitamins to counter vitamin D deficiency are high, indicating that almost all families are fully engaged with universal services. Although the level of childhood obesity is above average, programmes, such as 'HENRY' (health, exercise and nutrition for the really young) and 'Lazy Town', are having a marked impact on tackling the problem and improving lifestyles. In a consultation of 130 adults, the vast majority indicate that the centre has been instrumental in helping them to adopt healthier lifestyles. The number of hospital admissions for burns, scalds and falls has reduced because of the centre's preventative measures, home visits and awareness raising. Parents say that the centre provides them with a haven where they feel extremely safe. Individual case studies illustrate that the centre has been instrumental in saving marriages, improving outcomes for children on child protection plans and protecting potentially vulnerable adults and children.

There is no doubt that the centre has a major impact on improving parenting skills. 'Seedlings' paves the way, as volunteers engage parents and carers in a wide range of stimulating activities which help them to learn how to interact with their children. Enjoyment is evident everywhere, and parents and carers are effusive in their praise for the way the centre helps them to learn. At least half of the parents and carers registered at the centre attend some type of course, evaluations for which are almost entirely positive and indicate excellent learning outcomes. Many adults, for example, take important first steps to employment by participating in English language and other educational courses. The volunteer programme has also helped many adults to acquire new skills. Nineteen people who first came as parent volunteers are now employed by the centre. Children who attend the 'Mini Springers' nursery make excellent progress which prepares them really well for the transition to school. Local schools say that children who have attended the centre are much better prepared for school than those who have not. Outcomes at the end of Early Years Foundation Stage for 2011 showed that almost all children who had attended the nursery reached the nationally expected level for their age.

The friendly, welcoming, accepting and encouraging ethos of the centre makes a

major contribution to establishing positive relationships which cross all cultural and faith boundaries. The views of parents and carers contribute strongly to the centre's decision-making processes. Minutes of the regular and well-attended parents' forum are on open display, as is the log of users' comments and suggestions, every one of which receives a response from the centre. The contribution of volunteers to the life of the community is exceptional. For many, many families, the children's centre is the very heart of their community and is having a profound and positive impact on their lives. As one parent put it, 'The community cares for the centre and the centre cares for the community.'

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
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 children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	1

How good is the provision?

1

Staff are extremely good at identifying needs within the community and then providing services to meet these needs. Visits to every family shortly after the birth of a child provide the platform for identifying these needs. Families who do not engage with the centre's services are then revisited. A large number of services and activities take place every day, and the centre is a constant hive of activity. Participation rates for most services are high and retention rates are excellent. The centre is creative and adaptable in the way it seeks to provide services to target groups. For example, the centre is aware that an above average proportion of mothers suffer from postnatal depression. A support group was set up for them but was poorly attended. The centre ascertained the reasons for this and is now training staff and volunteers to provide a befriending service in the home. Initiatives to engage target groups, those in the most deprived areas and other groups that are not yet accessing services at the centre, are highly successful.

The centre is highly successful in promoting purposeful learning, as seen in the very large number of adults who participate in enjoyable courses. The centre removes barriers to learning by providing crèche facilities so that adults can attend courses. Participants' views of the centre's activities are highly positive and result in many

users coming to the centre because of word-of-mouth recommendations. Educational provision for children in the nursery is excellent. Children’s progress is tracked carefully. Adults are confident in sharing their concerns and problems and appreciate the excellent care, guidance and support which are provided by staff, volunteers and partner organisations. Parents and carers welcome home visits and feel that the support provided at the centre is personalised and relevant to their needs. A wide range of information and one-to-one consultation sessions are provided so that parents and carers are fully informed on all aspects affecting their health and well-being, and many are helped to access benefits and other services which have an important impact on their families.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

The centre is led and managed exceptionally well. A strong and experienced board of trustees ensures that the work of the centre fits in with the vision of The Springfield Project, plays a major role in determining the strategic direction of the centre, and holds the head of centre to account. The head of centre and senior leaders display a burning passion to serve the community and are constantly on the lookout for new and innovative ways to improve what is already outstanding provision. For example, the inspectors were taken to view a new allotment project which is being undertaken to improve healthy outcomes and develop practical skills which can lead to future employment. The day-to-day management of the centre is excellent; staff are committed, sensitive, empathetic and willing to go the extra mile. Excellent relationships with a wide range of partners contribute significantly to the centre’s rich programme of activities, and partners are very clear about the centre’s main priorities. Partners find the centre’s staff supportive and cooperative and they contribute willingly and helpfully to the free flow of information which helps the centre to decide its priorities.

The centre is highly effective in analysing needs and setting ambitious targets for the future. In many respects, its evaluation of the effectiveness of its services is meticulous. For example, the immediate impact of all services is evaluated exhaustively. However, the quality of provision of a few services is not monitored with quite as much rigour as others and the centre does not always have a clear picture of the long-term impact of some services. Staff are methodical in gathering and recording information, but the centralised database which is managed by the local authority does not yet have sufficient flexibility to collate all of this information

efficiently. As a result, it is not always easy to access collated information or extract data to show how effective the centre actually is. These are not major weaknesses, because the centre has such a good understanding of the community and its needs. They are refinements to help an already outstanding centre to become even more effective.

The centre's procedures for safeguarding families and children are excellent. All who work or help in the centre undergo checks with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure they are suitable people to work with children. All activities are risk assessed, including home visits, for which the centre's staff are frequently accompanied by a volunteer. Many of the centre's staff are trained in using the Common Assessment Framework, but the centre's preventative work and its day-to-day support are so successful that the Framework rarely needs to be used.

The centre's work to promote equality and diversity is quite exceptional and is seen in the way so many people of different faiths and from different backgrounds engage with the work of the centre and work together in harmony. The staff are highly sensitive to different cultures and sensitivities. They seek to understand and to break down barriers, especially those for disabled children.

The centre makes excellent use of its resources, successfully taps into additional funding wherever possible and increases its impact by training and using large numbers of volunteers. It provides excellent 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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area 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

The inspection team referred to the latest inspection report for Mini Springers Nursery which took place in October 2009. Leadership and management of the nursery, provision and the outcomes for children were all judged to be outstanding. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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 Springfield Children's Centre on 11 and 12 October 2011. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We really appreciated the opportunity to talk with many of you during the inspection. Thank you for giving up your time to do so and for being so open and honest with us. Everyone we spoke to was full of praise for the centre and the way the staff go out of their way to be helpful to you. Many of you told us that the centre has been instrumental in changing life for your families for the better. Your views helped to confirm our conclusions about the centre which are set out below.

The centre is led and managed exceptionally well by the trustees of The Springfield Project, the head of centre and the senior leaders. All who are employed by the centre, and the many volunteers who give up their time to help run activities, clearly have a passion to serve the local community. Excellent partnerships with a wide range of professionals, such as midwives, health visitors, and other organisations enable the centre to provide a very wide range of services indeed. We were particularly struck by the centre's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and its work to integrate people from different faiths and many different cultural backgrounds. We saw this particularly clearly in 'Seedlings', which is run entirely by volunteers. It was a delight to see so many parents, carers, children and helpers working and playing together in harmony and friendship. The number of families attending 'Seedlings' over the course of a year is staggering, and we can see that you value this provision very highly indeed from the fact that many of you arrive so early to secure a place.

The centre's leaders are very good at identifying the most urgent needs within the community and then providing an excellent range of services to meet these needs. The staff do this by visiting, as soon as they possibly can, every family in which a child has been born and finding out how the centre can be helpful to you. They also take great note of the views which you express at the parents' forum and your feedback whenever you attend an activity. Leaders carry out research to identify

families who are not accessing the centre and those who have the greatest level of need. The centre staff are very successful in helping these families participate in the centre's activities. You have also been very helpful in recommending the centre to others.

One of the centre's main priorities is to help you lead more healthy lifestyles. The centre provides some excellent courses and many opportunities for you to talk to health professionals. Your feedback shows that nearly all who participate in the centre's health-related courses have improved their understanding of and commitment to leading a healthier lifestyle. The 'HENRY' course has been particularly effective in helping to reduce obesity in children, which is a big problem within the community.

The staff are very good at ensuring your safety when at the centre and helping you to improve safety within your homes. The centre's initiative to provide safety gates at low cost has helped to reduce the incidence of burns, scalds and falls within the home. A special parenting programme, which has been put on a number of times, has been very successful in improving relationships and children's behaviour within the home.

There are many excellent opportunities for you to improve your skills through attending English or mathematics courses or through volunteering to help. Many have taken the first steps to finding employment as a result of the centre's support. Your children also have excellent opportunities to learn, especially those who are able to attend sessions at the nursery. Schools say that children who have attended 'Mini Springers' are much better prepared for school than those who have not had this opportunity.

We have identified nothing major for the centre to improve because the service it provides is already outstanding. In order for it to become even better, we have suggested that the centre's leaders check the quality of some of its services a little more rigorously and see what impact some of its courses have over the longer term. We have also suggested that they look for more effective ways of collating information from a range of sources to reduce the amount of paperwork they have to deal with.

The level of support you have given, when the centre's services have been threatened because of financial cutbacks, shows how much you value the children's centre. This is also seen in the very high proportion of families with young children who use the centre's services during the course of the year. Having experienced the warmth and friendship of the staff at the centre and seen what an outstanding range of services it provides for you, we can understand why you are so proud for the centre to be at the heart of your community.

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