

Inspection report for Footprints Children and Family Centre

Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	383720
Inspection dates	12–13 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Susan Mann HMI

Centre leader	Jac MacLean
Date of previous inspection	This is the centre's first inspection
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Reflections 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.

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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 parents and carers, managers, the chair of the partnership board and centre staff. They also met with representatives of partner agencies and the local authority. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Footprints Children and Family Centre is a full service phase one centre. It directly offers all elements of the full core offer. The early years provision, Reflections Nursery, is delivered by a linked private childcare provider offsite. The centre is managed by the local authority. The centre's partnership board performs the role of advisory board. The centre has recently undergone a management restructure and the manager and centre coordinator were appointed in October 2011.

The area served by the centre is one of the 30% most deprived in England. The level of deprivation varies across the area: the Seldon ward averages around 38% most deprived; Central and Heene wards fall within the 20% most deprived nationally. The centre has a reach area of 1250 children. In general, children's levels on entry to early years education are below national expectations.

The centre operates from two sites. The main base is located at Crescent Road, and the satellite centre site opened in November 2010 in Lyndhurst Road. Both sites are served by public transport links. A very large majority of those families who live in the area are of White British background. There are a few families with minority ethnic backgrounds including those with Polish, Pakistani, African and other Asian heritage. The proportion of workless households and families on workless benefits is above the national average. The proportion of families who rent their home is well above the local and national average.

The proportion of teenagers who become pregnant is below the local and national average rate. In the wider local area, 15% of mothers are known to be smokers at

time of delivery and the area is the second worst in the county for tooth decay in children aged under five.

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

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

3

Main findings

Footprints Family and Children’s Centre offers satisfactory overall effectiveness. The management of the centre has recently been restructured after a lengthy period of review. These changes have been implemented well by the local authority and centre management team, and impact on the quality of services for families using the centre has been minimal. Leaders and managers have a sound view of what is needed to improve provision and outcomes for all, and especially for those most in need. However, there has been little time to embed the new management and for this reason the centre’s capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory.

The centre delivers satisfactory outcomes overall. Suitable partnership working with a range of agencies, including health services, Jobcentre Plus and Homestart, lead to demonstrable improvement in the lives of many families, including those most in need of support. The centre monitors the impact of services for some families on an individual basis. For example, parents and carers who access the parenting course assess their levels of understanding at the beginning and end of the course. They then do the same at later points following the course completion to measure sustained improvements made. However, the centre does not yet have a robust system to measure the overall impact of its services on outcomes for all families. As a consequence, there is little consistent analysis of information to show the success of services, or the need for further development of these.

The centre partnership group has developed in recent months with the appointment of an independent chairperson. The chair has a clear view of what is needed to improve the effectiveness of the partnership board and priorities for its development have been identified. Although partner agencies undoubtedly support the centre appropriately, attendance of many key partners at meetings is irregular. Therefore, their participation in strategic evaluation and improvement planning for the centre is

limited. Evaluation by the leadership team is reasonably accurate, and provides a sound base for development planning. Most families give their view on provision through comments, a variety of forms, or use the centre's 'talking wall', although some are unaware of these avenues to give feedback. Children have sometimes given their evaluation: for example, some made pictures of their favourite toy as part of the toy library evaluation. Overall, systems of evaluation lack some rigour and consistent application to provide a strong foundation of assessment.

Families using the centre express a high level of satisfaction with the services offered. Many value the warm welcome provided by staff at both sites. Several adults who have accessed individual support because they found themselves in difficult personal circumstances are extremely positive about their experiences with the centre. As one said, 'When you come in here, you feel like a weight is lifted off your shoulders'. A few adults volunteer at the centre to support groups and events. However, there is no organised group such as a parents' forum, where a wide range of parents and carers can meet and deepen their involvement with the centre and help contribute to its running.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Implement effective systems to measure the impact of services so that improvement in outcomes is demonstrated clearly, especially for those from target groups.
- Improve overall evaluation to involve all key partners and centre governance, so that strategic development planning is accurately focused on improving outcomes for all families in the centre's reach area, especially those most in need.
- Develop the centre partnership group to include parent and carer representation and ensure all key partners are fully and regularly engaged, so the board represents the centre's work better and becomes more effective in improving services for families.
- Engage parents and carers from a range of backgrounds representative of the centre's catchment area, to share their views on centre services and represent the opinions of others through the development of a forum.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Overall, parents, carers and their children achieve sound outcomes as a result of their engagement with the centre. The centre effectively targets its services to prioritise those families most in need. It also ensures engagement with those for whom attendance may be challenging because of a disability, or because they have limited skills to speak English, or are from a minority group. Individual outcomes are assessed regularly through staff having detailed knowledge of families' well-being

and some basic measurement of improvement. However, a comprehensive assessment of how well families make steps forward as a result of their engagement with the centre is not yet fully in place.

Universal health services delivered from the centre premises, such as the health visitor child health clinic and the midwife ante-natal appointments, ensure families receive necessary health checks and advice. The percentage of children who are obese at Reception class age in the local area is generally in line with national average levels but remains a focus for centre services. The centre works with families to promote exercise through outdoor play, and healthy eating through parenting courses and cooking activities. Some parents and carers report these initiatives have had positive impact on their family's health. Partnership working with the oral health team helps families to improve their dental health, although no data are collected to measure improvement. Some parents and carers stop smoking as a result of health and centre support, although the full extent of the success of this is not known.

Parents and carers feel they and their children are safe at the centre. Children behave well to keep themselves and others safe when playing in groups and in the large outdoor area. Children play happily with a variety of toys while parents and carers wait for health appointments, and all staff are attentive and friendly to ensure their safety. Parents and carers trust staff with personal information. Those facing challenging circumstances in their lives make good progress in their parenting skills through courses and individual support. The centre diligently tracks the progress of those children on child protection plans, and most experience significant improvements over time. Those involved with the Common Assessment Framework make demonstrable improvement in levels of personal safety. Family outreach workers provide dedicated support and develop enabling relationships with vulnerable families to maintain good levels of engagement. The planned support offered keeps children safe and helps families improve their circumstances and understanding. Ongoing liaison with Homestart and appropriate integration into other centre services ensures these families receive help for as long as they need.

Families using the groups enjoy their time at the centre. Universal groups such as 'Stay and Play' promote independent and play-based learning for children. Appropriate planning links activities to the Early Years Foundation Stage. The centre liaises reasonably well with early years settings in its catchment area, including links with Reflections Nursery, to promote quality for centre families who use these settings. Adult learning in personal and educational development is enjoyable for those who participate. For example, a recent course, 'Playing with Language' was well attended by several parents and carers. This developed their understanding of promoting language development through play-based activities.

The centre works well with Jobcentre Plus and other external agencies to provide support for those seeking employment and benefits advice. The centre's 'warm phone' link to a family information service (childcare places information) helps parents and carers return to work and education. Some families, including several in

challenging circumstances, have improved their economic well-being and living accommodation through their engagement with centre services. These include some lone parents who now attend further education and university as a result of this support.

Adults using the centre are respectful of one another. Some parents and carers contribute to the governance of the centre through giving their opinions and evaluation of services. Those families who represent target groups for the centre, such as young parents and carers or those with minority ethnic heritage, are encouraged to give their views. Some changes are made as a result of this feedback, such as the hosting of a well-attended, universal group for Polish families.

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	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 children and parents, including those from target groups, 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 parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
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	3

How good is the provision?

3

The range of services is reasonably broad to meet most families' needs. The number of families living in the catchment area who attend the centre is just over half of all eligible households. This number has increased significantly in the past year. The centre has a sound analysis of the catchment area from data, as well as from partner and local knowledge. It uses this to assess the needs of local families, and measure the extent to which services are accessed by all groups living in its reach, so that none is excluded. There is a reasonable proportion of families from targeted groups, including families with Polish, Pakistani, African and Asian heritage, so that those attending the centre represent the local community quite well. The quality of care, guidance and support suitably meets the needs of families to result in satisfactory outcomes. In particular, the emphasis on individualised interaction supports those most in need appropriately.

The provision for learning and development is good, especially for those most in need of further help. Individual provision is strong. The centre's workers take

personal need and interest into account, and build on prior learning. Staff work closely with adults to encourage and facilitate further education opportunities at local colleges. As a result, quite a few more vulnerable adults become prepared and qualified for employment, although the centre does not yet collect clear evidence to demonstrate how their outcomes are improved. Those children in receipt of the two-year-old funding benefit from placements in high quality early years provision. There is a wide range of activities which promote purposeful learning for children and adults. For example, the popular 'Giggly Wiggly Music' group is run by parents of the centre and helps young children develop their language skills. It promotes close interaction between them and their parents and carers: children squeal with delight as they are lifted high when singing 'the wheels on the bus go up and down'.

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	3
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	3

How effective are the leadership and management?

3

The local authority has a clear view of the centre's operation and gives a suitable level of strategic support. The annual conversation process is rigorous to set further measures for improvement. The centre management team is coordinated in its aim to improve outcomes for all families, especially those most in need. The centre's partnership board has made a promising start following its recent reorganisation and capacity to improve is therefore satisfactory. Links with local schools and churches support the centre's partnership group reasonably well. Partnership working with a suitable range of key agencies is satisfactory. Frontline partnerships are effective in extending services for families. The premises of both sites are used most of the time and universal groups are well attended. Staff deployment is carefully managed so families feel cared for. As a result, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Equality and diversity are promoted reasonably well at the centre. The minority groups are engaged sufficiently well to promote better outcomes. The centre's management team has a clear picture of these groups and their engagement is monitored through basic data analysis. Disabled parents and carers receive sound support to access centre groups, including universal sessions such as 'stay and play', and feel included in centre life. Some adults who speak English as an additional language receive appropriate support, such as help to translate documents and signposting for needed services.

The effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements is good. Staff are knowledgeable

and tenacious in their approach to referral of concerns. They work well with external agencies such as social care and health to protect children from risk of harm. Thorough review procedures ensure children are protected well. The centre management team has a wealth of experience in implementing good safeguarding practice. All staff, partners and volunteers are rigorously checked to ensure they are suitable to work with families. A high emphasis is placed on children's and adults' emotional well-being. The development of their self-esteem is central to the ethos of the centre's practice, and is done through courses such as 'look good, feel good' and the face-to-face work with centre staff.

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 effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	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 partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3
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	3

Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

The linked early years provision, Reflections Nursery, was inspected in October 2010. Inspectors graded the provision to be outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Footprints Children and Family Centre on 12 – 13 October 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to those of you who took time to speak with us. It was helpful to meet you and we enjoyed hearing about how much you enjoy coming to the centre. We were especially pleased to hear how centre staff have helped many of you improve the quality of life for yourselves and your families.

We were impressed at how friendly the centre is, and how staff look after you and your children. Many of you told us that you feel safe at the centre and that you trust the staff there. Some of you have undertaken parenting courses to help you manage your children's behaviour and learn about how children develop. Staff give your children's well-being a high priority and all staff are focused on keeping them safe.

We enjoyed seeing some of the groups that run at the centre. We realise that many of you have benefited from the services provided, such as getting help, advice and training. Some of you told us how much you have gained from the parenting courses and from going to college. We have asked the centre managers to look at better ways to measure the difference services have made to the lives of you and your families, like developing a healthier lifestyle. We have also asked them to strengthen the evaluation of services. Both these steps will provide a clear view of what is working well and what is not. This will help the centre services improve further, and make even more of a difference to you and your families.

There are some other things we think the centre could do a little bit better. We have asked the managers to look at how the overall governance of the centre is organised. There is a centre partnership group for Footprints, but at the moment only a few other organisations, such as the school and the church, attend this and no parents and carers are involved in the meetings. We have asked the centre to change this so that parents, carers and more partner organisations attend regularly, such as representatives from health and social care services.

We have also asked the centre to develop the way you, as parents and carers, can give your feedback and become more involved in the running of the centre. We know some of you contribute your ideas and others work as volunteers for some groups. We have asked the centre managers to develop a parents' forum so that any of you who wish can meet to discuss issues concerning the centre and the work it does so that managers have a better idea about what suits you all.

We enjoyed our time at your centre, and wish you and your families well for the future.

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