

Inspection report for Howard Street Sure Start Children's Centre

Local authority	Rochdale
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	105757 Howard Street Nursery School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	EY396043 Howard Street Children's Centre (Creche) EY279723 Howard Street Day Care

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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 the centre manager, centre staff, the headteacher of the nursery school, parents and carers, key partners and two local authority officers linked to the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at sessions in operation at the centre. They also looked at a range of documentation including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Howard Street Children's Centre is a Phase 1 centre which was established in 2006 and is co-located on the site of Howard Street Nursery School. The centre serves the wards of Spotland, Falinge and Healey. The wards of Spotland and Falinge are ranked amongst the 30% most deprived areas in the country. The main social issues affecting these areas include a growing number of lone parents and a rise in families on workless benefits. Health issues affecting the areas include some poor attitudes towards healthy lifestyles, for example on weaning children when ready and reducing the intake of sugar.

Family support, and early years advice, education and childcare are offered at the centre. Health partners are based at Ings Lane clinic. The centre works with three health centres. The social work team is based at Crossfield Mill. Around half the families are White British and around one quarter are of Pakistani heritage. A growing number of families are refugees and families seeking asylum. The reach area is characterised by a mix of private and social housing.

Children in the reach area enter childcare and early education with a much narrower range of experiences and with skills below those that are expected for their age. The centre operates a variety of groups and activities on site and at different designated sites across the community.

A range of professionals are represented on the advisory board, including centre staff, the headteacher from the nursery school, representatives from health, housing officers, the asylum team, a voluntary community group and users.

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

The centre has recently been through a period of disruption, with staff reorganisation and closure for six months while refurbishment work took place on the building. At the same time the reach area doubled in size. The centre has managed to sustain the numbers of families registering at the centre. However, due to an extended reach and families going elsewhere due to closure, the centre had seen a decline in those accessing its services. The local authority has acted quickly and appointed a dynamic centre leader who has established two new satellite sites in the extended reach. In addition, due to a concerted effort in the local area, data show that the numbers of families starting to use the centre are increasing month by month. This focused approach to encourage more families to visit the centre and use its resources demonstrates that the centre has satisfactory capacity to improve. The health teams are now based at the centre and increasing numbers of families are accessing these services. Nonetheless, health partners are not routinely sharing data with the centre to further increase the number of registrations, or actively promoting and helping the centre as well as they could to engage more families.

The centre is a place of enjoyment and safety for the children and families that are accessing its services. Typical comments which reflect the views of many are, 'They really get to know you at this centre; you are not just a person walking through the door.' However, as the centre is not engaging sufficient families from across the area it is difficult for them to demonstrate how well they know the needs of all the families with young children in their area and whether the activities they offer are meeting the needs of the whole community.

Governance is satisfactory due to the advisory board still developing. Attendance by some key partners is variable. As a consequence, the board does not always have the required information to make important decisions or to monitor the work of the centre.

Good quality family support and outreach work ensures that families who are considered most at risk receive timely intervention and support. The early years team is pivotal to the centre's work. The team's members are highly skilled, which helps adults to understand how they can assist with their child's learning and development. However, adults have too few opportunities to learn more than basic skills in literacy and numeracy. As a consequence they are not in a position to seek employment, or for those in work to gain the necessary skills to apply for jobs that pay higher salaries than the minimum wage. Adult users who use the centre grow in emotional strength and increasingly contribute to the local community through representation on the advisory board and membership of the school governing body. The centre manager and staff form a supportive team, committed to improving services and outcomes for users. Staff are held in high esteem by users who appreciate how much support is quickly available once their individual needs are known. There is appropriate work to ensure equal access to its services and to minimise any potential for discrimination.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Increase users' involvement by:
 - identifying and engaging further with families in the community who are not accessing the centre's activities.
- Further improve outcomes and provision by:
 - developing health partnerships further so that they provide the best possible range of integrated services and regular, timely and detailed information to the children's centre.
- Improve governance within the children's centre by:
 - strengthening the way in which the advisory board acts as critical friends in challenging and holding the centre to account for its work.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Children and families who attend the centre make the most of an appropriate range of activities, such as 'Tackle the Takeaway' where parents learn the benefits of healthy eating and how to cook cheaper and healthier food options. In addition the popular 'Lunch Munch' encourages children to try new foods. The dental oral hygiene team attends these sessions to help educate parents and children on the importance of looking after their teeth and gums. Despite this support many children do not enter school at a healthy weight or visit a dentist regularly. The 'Positive Parenting Skills and Survival' course enhances self-esteem and helps to build bonds between parents and their children. Through this course parents learn about behaviour and the impact of their actions on their children's lives. Fathers are regularly seen in the centre and attend a good range of the activities with their children.

However, they have yet to engage at a governance level to ensure that their views are heard. Sessions such as 'Baby Massage' are popular and help parents learn the positive value of physical stimulation including holding, movement, touch and relaxation techniques.

Children who attend the centre are happy and engage well in the activities available, whilst adults confirm how much they benefit from links with the centre as they socialise and grow in confidence. For example, some parents from the Falinge area were recently involved in a film documentary 'Blossoming Falinge'. This gave local families the chance to show the positive aspects of the area following critical comments about the community in the local and national press. Children make good strides in their communication, language and literacy skills with a greater proportion now reaching levels expected of them when they enter school. Whilst data show that the achievement gap is narrowing from 24% to 23% the centre has yet to break down this data to ensure that these promising signs are across their target groups, which include children of lone parents and children in workless households.

Users of the centre say that they feel completely safe. This is a positive change in culture as the area in which the centre is based used to be known as a dangerous area to visit. Parents know that they can trust the staff to help them in times of crisis or personal difficulties. The centre works in partnership with Fire Safety Advisors who visit groups to discuss fire safety and also visit all homes in the area to help families understand the importance of how to make an escape plan in case a fire does break out. In addition, all homes are provided with smoke alarms.

Children and adults form positive relationships and so the centre is an orderly and happy place. Staff from Barnardos work well with the centre staff to provide an integrated package of care and support for children with a special educational need and/or disability. Users have good opportunities to offer suggestions and requests for activities that they feel will benefit their children. They regularly submit ideas to managers via the Parent Champions who are very visible in the centre and attend activities to ensure that users' views are heard and shared with the centre manager and with the advisory board.

The centre works closely with the Citizens Advice Bureau which offers an advocacy and advice service. This successful partnership ensures families are able to access the benefits to which they are entitled, which in turn has helped many families avoid getting into debt.

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	2
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

Centre staff know children and their families who use their services well and meet their individual needs effectively. Joint home visits are often made with staff from a referring agency, ensuring that family support is carefully focused on parents' and carers' needs. Families approach staff with confidence and recognise the centre as a place of safety. Parents comment that, 'You can ask the staff here about anything, they go out of their way to help you.' Nonetheless, the centre's reach is not sufficiently extended to ensure that a greater majority of families feel this supported. The centre provides appropriate support for user groups such as childminders. They are helped to deliver quality provision for children through their attendance at a range of activities which are run by the early years team. Early Years Foundation Stage planning is on display in the centre so childminders can link this to children's development records and can provide purposeful learning outside the centre.

All parents and carers who spoke to inspectors were positive about the centre and explained the impact different services have had on their families' lives. They were particularly complimentary about the care, support and guidance offered at the centre and in their home and about the good range of activities they can attend at the centre. The close working relationships between the day care staff and the nursery school ensure that the children who attend the centre move seamlessly into the school environment. Parents value groups such as 'Stay and Play', where they play alongside their children and staff from the centre. During these sessions parents are able to see good practice in action across a variety of child development perspectives. By attending 'Storytime' at the local library, parents and children learn to enjoy reading together. A typical comment was, 'This session has encouraged us to keep coming back to the library and borrow more books'. However, the centre does not routinely record whether the parents accessing these courses are from their target groups.

The centre is a very welcoming place. There is a good mix of consultation and training rooms which are used by a wide range of partners. For example, Children and Adults Mental Health Team (CAMHS) sessions allow families to spend valuable time together while establishing positive relationships and firmer foundations for family life. The resources throughout the centre are of good quality. The centre ensures that good quality information about many aspects of parenting, including advice about how to keep children healthy and safe, is freely available to parents.

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	3
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 senior leadership team is committed to extending services and providing the very best life chances for local children and their families. Regular parent evaluations and consultations help the leaders and managers to gauge if they are meeting needs appropriately. However, more work remains to be done to evaluate the needs of the whole community to ensure the centre has the resources, information and the data it needs to encourage more users to attend and engage with the services at the centre. Operational management is satisfactory and financial resources are carefully managed. Governance is supportive but the role of the advisory board is still gathering momentum. There are regular performance management arrangements and supervisions in place for staff who feel valued and able to develop their own professional expertise through training opportunities. Taking all this into account, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

The centre promotes diversity which is celebrated through resources and information that reflects different faiths, cultures, and backgrounds. However, it has yet to ensure that the gap in outcomes between vulnerable families and the families considered to be less at risk is showing signs of narrowing. Careful consideration has been given to the design of the centre so that all users can gain full access. Centre staff provide an effective level of service to families who they know have children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

User engagement is good. The centre has sought the views of parents and children through regular questionnaires and surveys. Outcomes are shared on a notice board which is strategically placed so that users know their views have been considered and what action has been agreed. For example, children helped to select toys and equipment for the outdoor play area and, in response to a request from working parents, evening and Saturday activities are now taking place.

Partnerships continue to develop well with effective collaboration between the centre and most partners. There is close attention to child protection and all staff are trained to use the Common Assessment Framework. Safeguarding users is a clear priority at the centre and keeping children and families safe is at the forefront of their work. The centre's comprehensive policies and procedures are well embedded in the centre and applied routinely. Case study evidence indicates that families have received well-integrated and sensitive support in times of crisis. Safeguarding arrangements comply with the Local

Safeguarding Children's Board requirements. Clear procedures are in place for reporting child protection issues and are fully understood and followed by all staff and key partners.

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 of 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.	2

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

The Ofsted report for Howard Street Children's Centre (day care) has been considered as part of this inspection. The setting was inspected November 2011 and achieved a good outcome judgement. In addition the Ofsted report for Howard Street Nursery School has been considered as part of this inspection. The setting was inspected in November 2011 and achieved a judgment of outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Howard Street Children's Centre on 19–20 October 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

We met a variety of users during the inspection and they are all strong supporters of the centre and its work. Our thanks go to everyone who shared their views. These helped us to appreciate how important the centre is to so many of you. Since April 2011, there has been a new centre manager who is actively working with you, listening to what you have to say and what activities you feel should be offered to meet your families' needs. As a result more activities are being offered at the centre, including evening and Saturday activities and more of you are starting to return to the centre. We know how much you value and appreciate your new building following the recent refurbishment and were delighted to see so many of you in the centre and attending the health clinics. However, there are still many families in the area who are not using the centre's resources.

Those of you that we spoke to told us about the very caring staff. You clearly appreciate the guidance and support on offer and you gave examples of how the centre has helped to change lives for the better. This caring approach by all the adults working in the centre is reflected in the good safeguarding procedures that help local children and families to live and learn safely. The centre's day care staff offer a wonderful service to you and your children. You told us how much you appreciate the help and support they give you to help you understand how your young children learn and develop. Whilst some of you told us that you are learning new skills yourself, such as basic literacy and numeracy we found that there are too few opportunities for you to build on these skills and gain recognised qualifications that will help you find employment and improve your families' economic stability. We noticed that while the centre provides you with lots of ideas and activities on how to provide healthy nutritious meals, it has yet to have a positive effect on weaning for some children.

We have said that some elements of the centre's work needs to improve. We have asked that the advisory board becomes more challenging and that it has all the information it needs to make good decisions on your behalf. We have also asked the centre to look at ways in which it can encourage more families to access its services. After speaking with many of you we are sure that this is something that you can help the centre with as well. We know that many of you appreciate the health clinics now being based at the centre. However, we feel the health partners could do more to help the centre register a larger number of families. Also we feel that the health partners could do more to help those families they meet who are not engaging with the centre to understand just how much the centre's staff and activities can help improve their families' outcomes.

Thank you to all that we met for your input into the inspection. It really was appreciated.

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