

Inspection report for Firswood Children's Centre

Local authority	Trafford
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Centre leader	Mrs Val Gray
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Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	

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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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the head of centre, staff, parents and representatives from statutory and voluntary partner agencies, the local authority and the advisory board.

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

Information about the centre

Firwood Children's Centre is located on a school site in the Firwood area of Trafford. The centre uses a number of private day care providers including a local authority day nursery and local childminders within a one mile radius. The centre is a Phase 2 children's centre that provides services aligned to the full core purpose for children's centres. The local authority is responsible for governance of the centre. The head of centre is responsible for service delivery across the reach area for this centre. She also has responsibility for one other children's centre in the locality. The centre serves an area largely in the top 70% most disadvantaged areas in the country with smaller areas which are in the top 20% and 30% most disadvantaged areas. Services delivered from the centre by the children's centre team and partners include health services, family support, employment and training support and signposting, targeted support for vulnerable families, universal services such as 'Play and Stay', early intervention services, such as home learning, 'Ready Steady School' and targeted story rhyme times, and family and adult learning.

The centre serves a small but densely populated area. The area served by the centre has a range of housing stock including local authority properties, private rental accommodation and private housing. The population of children is more diverse than is average in Trafford, with 48.1% of children in Firwood being from minority ethnic backgrounds in 2010 compared with the 18.5% across Trafford. Levels of worklessness are not high but are rising. A minority of children aged under five years are living in families dependent on

workless benefits. Children enter Early Years Foundation Stage provision across the area with skills and abilities that are lower than those typically found nationally.

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

2

Main findings

Firswood Children’s Centre is a satisfactory centre. There are several good aspects to its work. Parents who use the centre are full of praise for the welcoming and supportive staff team and they say the centre has made a real difference to their lives. The head of centre sets high standards for staff and has a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the centre. The centre is focusing on promoting its work in the community and is growing in prominence as a place where families can go to receive good quality guidance and support, demonstrating the centre’s good capacity to sustain improvement. In some aspects, the centre can demonstrate that outcomes for families are good and improving rapidly, such as children’s achievements at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage. These improvements are the result of programmes developed to meet the challenging targets set by the centre to meet its priorities. However, the centre cannot confidently demonstrate the impact it is having on outcomes across the full range of outcome areas. In addition, there is not enough secure information analysed to demonstrate whether the improvement in outcomes is affecting all families in the area and particularly those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable or hard-to-engage.

The number of families registered with the centre is low, but increasing. Attendance at the centre by families who live in the reach area is higher than the number of registrations. Information from strategic health partners, such as live-birth data, is not shared with the centre to enable it to have a clearer view of where young children are living in the reach area. In addition, while the centre is noting some successes in the number of families accessing training or moving off benefits, partners such as Jobcentre Plus and training providers do not always share information in a clear enough format to highlight the impact of their work. This, and the centre’s limited but developing analysis of the information gathered from centre sessions, affects the centre’s ability to demonstrate the impact it is having on improving some outcomes. These include the improvement in economic stability

for families, the outcomes of adult learning and whether sufficient families from target groups are accessing the centre.

A wide range of methods is used to gain parents' views, such as through the parents' group. Parents who use centre services have regular opportunities to feedback on the quality of their experience. In some instances, such as following attendance on an evidence-based parenting course, evaluation is more focused on the learning and the difference this has made to the parent's life. Parents' views are well considered and used to make changes and develop the centre. A powerful example of this was parents' concern that the outdoor play area used by the crèche was small and unwelcoming to children. Consultation with parents, the school who owns the land and the inclusion officer has resulted in an accessible and child-friendly play area that includes sensory features to support the experiences of children with disabilities in their play. The welcoming and accessible building is well used to ensure that families with a range of needs and from a range of backgrounds can access services without prejudice.

The centre has experienced a number of changes to staffing in the last 12 months. This has not impacted on the relationships developed with partners locally. Safeguarding families whose circumstances may have made them vulnerable is a strength of the centre. Families experiencing significant change or challenge in their lives receive tailored and targeted support. The sustained engagement with families needing intensive support is a notable strength of the centre which leads to improved parenting skills and effective emotional support in times of crisis.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure the Primary Care Trust speeds the processes to overcome barriers to sharing relevant data about the location and number of young children in the area.
- Improve the analysis and quality of information gathered at centre level to demonstrate the impact the centre is having in the reach area and in particular with the centre's target groups.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre successfully promotes healthy lifestyles. A large majority of families in the area engage well with the adjacent health centre services, taking the opportunity to protect their children from high risk childhood diseases through the immunisation programme. The centre strongly supports breastfeeding mothers through their peer support volunteer group, effectively increasing the number of babies who are still being breastfed at six to eight weeks old. Healthy diets are well promoted at every opportunity, including at crèche snack-time when fruit and vegetables are provided. Parents who use the centre are developing a

good understanding of how to keep their families healthy, particularly through monitoring sugar, salt and fat levels in foods they buy.

The emphasis on helping parents and children who use the centre to raise their awareness of how to keep safe is strong. Users say they feel safe in the centre and with staff. They engage well with tailored support packages and outcomes for families who have received this type of support are good. Use of the Common Assessment Framework is well established in the centre's work. Families appreciate this multi-agency approach to the support given to them saying it reduces their stress and speeds up the processes for moving on to the next stage in their progress. Significant successes with this process include support to help families gain confidence to flee domestic violence and families sustaining improvements in their parenting skills which enable them to continue to live together as a family unit.

Children in the reach area make good progress when they attend the centre's preferred childcare provision or have one-to-one home learning support. Users are involved well in the governance of the centre through membership of the advisory board, a parents' forum and parents' group. The centre has some detailed case studies that demonstrate how well some individual families have made progress in their personal and social development and improved their economic stability. While these case studies are valuable evidence of families' progress, they are not sufficient to demonstrate that these outcomes are improving for the majority of families in the area. A small but growing number of users are volunteers in the centre and parents have been well supported to set up parent 'Come and Play' sessions in the nearby church. The centre's developing partnerships with the college and voluntary partners such as the local church, are contributing to adults' personal, social and economic development. However, there is too little information shared, for example by Jobcentre Plus, and analysed at a local level to gain an overview about how well all families across the reach area are progressing in these areas.

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	2
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?

2

The centre knows the families who use it well. It is working successfully with partners to engage with male carers, young parents and families of children who have a disability. The centre reports it has started to see an increase in the number of users from the Asian community, which is mostly close to the centre. Monitoring of non-users is hindered by a lack of detailed information about where young children live in the reach area and whether they are from groups whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Therefore, while services are well matched to users and to the centre's priorities, it is less clear whether they are well matched to the needs of the area as a whole.

The centre is a welcoming environment, which is parent friendly. A wealth of information is carefully displayed in the entrance for parents to look at, either at their leisure or with support from centre staff. The centre provides a wide range of good-quality family learning opportunities and supports families of some of the most vulnerable two-year-olds to access funded nursery places. Crèche places are provided to support adults to access learning opportunities and they are very much appreciated by parents who use them. Sessions such as the parents' group are well used to deliver messages by relevant speakers about issues such as fire safety. This complements the core purpose of the group, which is a means of consultation with parents. Users who access the centre's courses and those run by the college are encouraged to progress to other courses or activities.

All parents who spoke to inspectors were positive about the centre. They were complimentary about the care and support offered to them in their home through outreach services and at the centre. One parent who had used the centre services when at a very low point was very clear about the benefits. Without support to access financial advice, counselling, help in the home and childcare, these parents would not have been confident enough or in a position to do the voluntary work in which they are now involved.

A successful 'Ready, Steady, School' programme was run with the linked school and it is planned to roll this out to the other two schools that are served by the centre. The programme was effective in preparing children and parents for school life and children accessing this settled well at school. While children enter school with skills and knowledge that are below those expected for their age, data show that where provision has been targeted, for example on children's communication and language, their skills are improving well. Progress made by adults is less visible.

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.

2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

Leadership and management are good at all levels. There is motivating leadership from the head of centre that empowers staff to take control of their professional development in order to meet the wide-ranging needs of centre users. For example, they are able to effectively support the increasing number of families suffering domestic abuse. The staff group has experienced significant changes and challenges; however, these have not been detrimental to the quality of service they provide to users. The centre has challenging targets which link closely to the local authority's priorities. The advisory board is well informed about the centre's progress towards its targets and members are confident to tackle the head of centre about progress. Monitoring by the local authority is regular. Feedback and questioning highlight where data is needed to support assertions of improvement.

The centre's comprehensive range of policies and procedures are well embedded and applied routinely. The centre promotes diversity well, celebrating it through resources that reflect different faiths and cultures. A carefully constructed display about Judaism in the reception area was attractive and informative. The faith focus of this display changes regularly to reflect not only community faiths but those of the wider community too. Targeted work with early years settings has led to the achievement gap between children whose circumstances mean they may find it more difficult to learn and their peers narrowing steadily. Children with disabilities are well supported by the centre. A specialist play session runs at the centre. Families take advantage of the accessibility of the centre and the specially designed outdoor play area. The centre is highly aware that it is not reaching a significant number of families with young children in the area and is taking action to improve on this. However, the centre is not able to consistently demonstrate that it is effectively reaching and sustaining engagement with the majority of its target groups or those who live in the most disadvantaged areas. Although services are targeted to meet the needs of users and meet priorities, systems to track and demonstrate the impact of the good provision are still developing and outcomes overall are satisfactory. Consequently the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

Safeguarding families is a priority of the centre. The centre's policies and procedures are well understood and routinely applied by staff and partners. These include safer recruitment checks and child protection processes. Users have a clear understanding about information-sharing protocols. Case study evidence indicates that families receive well-integrated and timely support. Systems to monitor case work and case loads are sound, with the lead agency working with the family taking a lead role on this.

Good partnerships at a local level are central to the early intervention and prevention work in which the centre is involved. The clarity of referrals systems and relationships was

highlighted when a voluntary partner contacted the centre when a client disclosed they were suffering from domestic abuse. Swift action was taken to provide support systems. The centre is increasingly and successfully using partners to support service delivery, for example, by providing a crèche for a course run by the college that meets the priorities for both organisations. There is case study evidence of sustained improvement following attendance on the domestic abuse and violence programme at the centre. Systems to monitor the impact of the partners' contribution to the centre's work are still developing.

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	2
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	2
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	2
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

None.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Firwood Children's Centre on 18-19 October 2011. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you to those of you who came to talk to us in meetings and during activities. We found this very useful and enjoyable. We also spent time reading some of the comments you make when you have been on a course at the centre. By doing this we found that you

really appreciate the work the centre does. We were pleased to hear that many of you feel more confident about your role as a parent since you have been using the centre.

We found that the centre provides a wide range of support, guidance and activities for families in the area. However, not enough families are using them and because the centre does not have detailed information about where families with young children live they do not know if they are working with those who need support the most. We have asked the local authority to work with their partners to overcome the issues that prevent them from sharing such information.

We know that you are developing a good understanding of how to keep your families safe and healthy and were pleased to see that more and more women continue to breastfeed their babies for longer than six weeks. The centre has some good information about how well children are doing and how well health and safety are improving. However, they do not have enough information to be able to show how well families' personal, social and financial well-being is improving across the area. We have asked the centre to improve what information they collect and how they use it to demonstrate the difference they are making to families' lives, particularly for those who might need more help than others.

The centre is really keen to provide you with as many opportunities to learn and develop as possible. It does this well with its partners and we know that when a crèche is provided this helps more of you to access the opportunities on offer. We know that when you receive support in your home or at the centre staff are careful to explain what will happen if they are concerned about your child and who they will share information with. This is because the centre is keen to reduce the risk of harm to children in the area and staff understand and use the procedures well.

The head of centre and the staff work hard to make the centre's work as effective as possible and we think that they are very able to keep improving the outcomes for your families and to involve more families from the area in the centre. The centre is keen to involve parents in the life of the centre and the parents' group and parents' forum are used well by you to make your views about the centre known. We know that the centre listens to you and the new, child-friendly outdoor play area at the centre is one outcome of this process.

Thank you to all the users we met for your input into the inspection. It really was appreciated and we wish you all the best for the future and for the continued success of your centre.

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