

Inspection report for Franciscan Children's Centre

Local authority	Wandsworth
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Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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Linked school if applicable	Franciscan Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not 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.

An inspection of the co-located/partner primary school was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The report of this inspection is available on our website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

This inspection was carried out by an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the manager of the centre and other staff as well as a wide range of representatives from the local authority, and health service professionals. Meetings were also held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher of the adjoining primary school. Inspectors talked to parents, carers and other users of the centre. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of documentation, including evaluations of services, safeguarding arrangements, case studies, other records, development plans and the centre's most recent review report, together with local authority data.

Information about the centre

Franciscan Children's Centre opened to the public in July 2010 under phase two of the Sure Start programme. The centre is housed in the former caretaker's accommodation, sharing the site with Franciscan Primary School. Since the end of Sure Start funding, the local authority now finances the provision, and the centre is governed by the school. There is also an advisory group who provides additional direction to the leadership and management of the centre. The centre is open for 52 weeks a year from Monday to Friday.

The children's centre reach area includes the surrounding roads within the Tooting Broadway area. The population is ethnically and socially very mixed. The largest groups are from Asian and African heritages. Furthermore, this centre is also used by families out of the reach area. A high proportion of families speak English as an additional language.

Overall, levels of deprivation are much higher than average in the reach area. Just under half of all families in the area are lone parents and an average proportion of parents are young mothers. A third of all children under five are from workless households. An above average proportion receive benefits in the reach area. A few children and parents are either disabled or have special educational needs.

Just over 750 families are registered with the centre and attendance rates from within the reach are broadly two thirds of this figure. The centre meets all elements of the core purpose, which include health services, family support and outreach activities to promote children's and parents' all-round development and well-being.

Most children join the centre with a range of skills and abilities that are below those typically expected for their age.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

The effectiveness of the children's centre in meeting the needs of and improving outcomes for families

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

Franciscan Children's Centre provides a good and improving service that meets parents' and children's needs, including the most vulnerable, well. Recent surveys show that parents are unanimous in their praise for the welcome that they receive and enjoy attending. They identify that the centre enriches their lives because they gain confidence, friendship and new skills, including parenting, which support their family life. As one commented, 'We love attending the centre because the atmosphere is just like an extended close-knit family'.

The centre works actively and successfully to enable all target groups to access its services. It meets the needs of those who have experienced domestic violence very well so that they are empowered to reshape their lives. The centre has already identified the need to increase user engagement still further, in particular by providing more activities for fathers.

The achievement of children and families is good overall. Children make good progress from their starting points. Last years' Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

scores showed that 59% of children achieved at least 78+ points and six points in personal, social and emotional development and communication, language and literacy. Staff know the families who use the centre well. In particular, the care, guidance and support offered are exemplary because they are well tailored to individual needs and help families most in need exceptionally well in times of crisis. Support is sensitive and underpinned by an effective partnership with a wide range of services. Highly effective coordination of inter-agency work, together with robust child protection arrangements result in effective safeguarding procedures. One parent explained it like this: 'The centre cared for me and the courses helped me to become more confident.'

As a result of effective partnerships with health, education and social welfare agencies, most parents are enabled to improve their family lives, leading to good outcomes overall. A large majority of parents are delighted with the way that activities help them to learn positive behaviour management techniques, overcome stress and adopt healthy lives. Of note is the success the centre has had in encouraging volunteers to gain key skills to enable them to move on to opportunities in childcare.

Case studies and anecdotal evidence demonstrate that some families are improving their economic well-being. However, although the range of adult education courses is developing, they are not specifically targeted at workless or low-income families.

Children benefit from the good transition arrangements, to either the nursery within the primary school or other nursery provision. Well-resourced activities to help children to learn and develop include pictures displayed at child-friendly height so that children can easily select the toys for themselves. They benefit from a well-designed outside area with a stimulating sensory garden. Aided by purposeful governance, the centre manager and headteacher at the school work well in partnership together to evaluate the centre's strengths and areas for development.

The use of data, although improving steadily, is key to ensuring that the centre's self-evaluation and development planning are as searching as possible and set measurable goals. Everyone is ambitious to make the centre outstanding, but targets are not always sufficiently challenging to ensure that the outcomes for the large majority of families are the highest possible. Taken overall, the centre's capacity to sustain improvement is good.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Embed systems of evaluation so that they demonstrate the impact of services on families and, as a result, outcomes are evidenced even more clearly by:
 - using data as rigorously as possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the outcomes for users of the centre
 - making sure that the development plan has challenging targets that are measurable and realistic in the drive to improve outcomes.

- Extend the engagement of families living in the catchment area in centre services through:
 - increasing learning, development and training opportunities, particularly for workless and low income families, in order to improve their economic and social well-being
 - building on the firm start already made to tailor more provision to fathers' needs and interests, including evening activities.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

Health outcomes are good. Centre services make a valuable contribution to increasing rates of breastfeeding and are popular amongst mothers. At 71%, the rates of sustained breastfeeding by mothers in the catchment area for longer than six weeks are better than those found borough-wide and nationally. Levels of children's obesity are more positive than local and national averages, and have been falling over time, with 9.6% of children considered obese when they enter Reception Year. All groups do well in widening their commitment to developing healthy lifestyles through projects such as the 'Boost' programme. Although the centre does not have specific data, informal evaluations of activities to improve dental health and increase smoking cessation indicate that the large majority of users benefit from the centre's courses. In the borough of Wandsworth as a whole, the rate of admissions to hospital accident and emergency (A & E) departments over the last three years for minor injuries is below the national average. The work of the centre aids this through its popular first-aid and A & E courses. Immunisation rates are improving well, although they remain slightly below average.

A number of parents are routinely engaged in the governance of the centre through sitting on the advisory board and being a part of the forum, 'Parents' Voice'. As a result, most parents give their views on services and these ideas shape future services. The centre plays a positive role in the local community as a result of effective partnerships and word-of-mouth recommendations. There is a strong ethos of friendly and mutual respect which is evident between families and staff. Families who speak English as an additional language receive translation support when needed, so that those families less confident in the use of English can access a wide range of information in a language with which they are familiar.

Arrangements for the use of the Common Assessment Framework result in high quality safeguarding support. This includes a very strong partnership between social and health workers as well as with the school. Good procedures are in place concerning safeguarding and risk assessment. These meet all government guidelines and include a carefully planned approach to child protection and the vetting of adults. If needed, children are quickly put on child protection plans. There is clear evidence to show that vulnerable families are very effectively supported by nurturing programmes and a range of parenting programmes. These ensure that parents are helped to manage their children with increasing success and this often helps keep families together or enables regular access to care by others.

Adult learning courses and referral for employment advice are helping improve the

economic well-being of some families, particularly for those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. There are good opportunities for adults to learn life-changing skills and good opportunities for volunteering. Case studies indicate good individual support and training leading to employment. However, only about a third of adults gain qualifications or progress to training, education or employment, although the range of adult courses is developing.

The work of the centre is focused on closing the gap between the bottom 20% of the community so that they can thrive educationally, socially and in their health outcomes.

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	2
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	2

How good is the provision?

2

Parents describe provision as a very professional and personalised experience and agree that staff know them very well. The centre is successfully meeting the needs of the large majority of groups in the reach and the wider community.

Parents, especially young mums, enjoy the 'Chopping and tasting' sessions. One explained how she realised that cooking with her children 'encourages them to eat well'. Another commented, 'Before, my son wouldn't eat any fruit but now he eats bananas, apples, celery and is very happy to try other fruits.'

Leaders focus provision effectively on target groups but there is more to do to make this outstanding. For example, although the centre has links with the Islamic Centre and local Tamil groups as well as with health visitors and midwives to help meet the needs of young mothers, the engagement of these groups is not yet good enough. This is because opportunities are occasionally missed to attract teenage mums to use the centre unless they are referred specifically by partner agencies.

Parents and grandparents greatly value the specially targeted 'drop in' services, such

as 'baby-massage' for assisting in the bonding of baby and mother and promoting emotional health and well-being. These help to reassure parents about their children's development and guidance when additional help is needed. Often, parents register at the centre initially through signposting by the midwife or health visitor. Parents then take advantage of other provision and they explained how they like being able to meet professionals in a 'child-friendly and safe environment'.

Stay and play sessions are very popular with parents. As one parent explained, 'Activities like this are great because my child gets the opportunity to experience messy play by making pretend cakes using chalk and paints, which I can't do at home.' The centre remains focused on improving the social and early language and communication skills for all children. The increased emphasis on enjoying stories and role-play through exploring their environment was evident during the inspection when children delighted in planting and watering grass-seeds for the first time.

Fathers are beginning to be more involved in the centre because leaders are listening to what parents want and they are joining in a range of activities. As a result, the centre now offers a dads' 'stay and play' session on Saturday mornings once a month. Nevertheless, the centre acknowledges that this is an area for further development.

Levels of care and support are impressive, particularly in times of crises and despair. This is demonstrated in the ways staff skilfully gain parents' confidence to speak about domestic violence. The centre works very closely with local women's groups to provide very informative and supportive courses. Women agree that they are empowered to make better relationships and feel good about themselves. As one parent said, 'This is a fantastic centre which gave me back my self-confidence and helped me keep my sanity. The service the centre provides is priceless.' Often, members of this group overcome their problems, return to work or go on to further training.

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	2
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	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The centre manager's drive, enthusiasm and vision are impressive. She sets high expectations, clear direction and has created a welcoming and friendly setting where relationships are warm and positive. Leaders at all levels have the promotion of inclusion, equality of opportunity and zero tolerance of any discrimination at the

heart of their work. Diversity is celebrated and embraced through the availability of leaflets in different languages and the recruitment of volunteers who are representative of the local community. As a result, the centre is closing the gap between the achievements of the lowest 20% and the rest of the community so that they can thrive educationally and socially and lead healthier lives.

Staff are effective in removing barriers such as low self-esteem, gaps in knowledge and understanding, low levels of education and poor parenting skills. The centre provides good value for money, runs extremely smoothly and uses its resources effectively to meet the needs of the reach area and wider community. The resources at the centre are managed efficiently to meet the needs of families, leading to good outcomes. Families using the centre express high satisfaction and state that provision and support are good and make a strong contribution to their families' well-being.

The centre's staff team demonstrate a clear vision of inclusion and commitment to the success of the centre. Staff and partners share high expectations and ambitions, and their drive has improved services for families. Professionals from a range of agencies make an effective commitment to partnership working and to improving the life chances of children and families, which results in good and improving outcomes. The centre seeks and welcomes the views of all families and uses them well to develop the provision.

Governance and accountability arrangements are well defined. These, together with multi-agency partnership, ensure that services are well integrated and reflective so that there is a good flow of information between the centre and the school. Outcomes for families are good because the centre monitors the quality and impact of services and identifies how it can improve them. Leaders have been working to use data more effectively to strengthen the evaluation of outcomes for all groups. This has led to effective links being made with the data team at the local authority to gather ever-increasing information about the impact of the work of the centre. As yet, much of this analysis is very new and has not yet become embedded at all leadership levels to ensure that the development plan has challenging targets that are measurable and realistic.

The impact of leaders' good work is evident for almost all target groups. For example, disabled parents and children are becoming increasingly involved by the recent formation of a support group to discuss issues surrounding their needs and give strategies to help their children develop their social, speaking and physical skills.

The centre has effective procedures for safeguarding and risk assessment. These meet government guidelines and include high quality checks on adults and a carefully planned approach to child protection. Well-trained staff not only ensure that through effective multi-agency cooperation, the safeguarding of children is given a high priority, but also equips parents with the skills, knowledge and understanding to ensure that this and safety arrangements are implemented within the home.

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	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	2
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	2

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

The Franciscan Primary School, which adjoins the Franciscan Children's Centre, was inspected on 22–23 May 2012 and was judged to be good overall.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Franciscan Children's Centre on 22 and 23 May 2012. We judged the centre to be good and improving.

Thank you very much for speaking with us and letting us come into your sessions. The information you gave us helped us to make our judgements. Many of you commented on how 'Staff are so professional and very welcoming'. Someone said, 'It's like a really close-knit family.' Like you, we were very impressed by the warmth of support and welcome provided by the manager, the headteacher of the school

and members of the good governance. Everyone works together to make sure that your individual needs are well met because partnerships with different organisations are outstanding. You often spoke about the fantastic help that you receive and how the centre is a lifeline to you. The excellent care, guidance and support work of the centre reduces depression and loneliness and enables you to overcome problems and have fun. Lone parents benefit considerably from the high quality support of the centre. We were especially impressed by the way that the centre supports families facing domestic violence.

The centre staff listen to you and ask you what you think of the services and activities they offer. They change how and when they do some things because of what you say. Parents make a good contribution to strategic decisions about the centre through being members of the advisory board. Partnerships with others are well developed in terms of making sure that you have access to the services that you need and want. Especially, this ensures that you and your children are safe and develop important life skills and emotional well-being.

We enjoyed seeing several of the activities and looking at your comments following evaluations. These clearly show how you gain much from the parenting courses, such as first aid and healthy living activities. There are good opportunities for you to learn life-changing skills linked to getting back to work. You spoke about having interesting activities to do and plenty of help with child development, home difficulties, financial worries and such things as breastfeeding and weaning. We must congratulate you on how well you have taken on board the information about being healthy and safe. The help provided for you to learn about how to manage your child's behaviour is also very helpful.

You agree that you feel welcomed whatever your specific needs or background. We confirm that attendance rates and community cohesion are strong. Notably, we could see that you make friends and this helps you to manage the new demands of being a parent. You are helped to understand how your children learn. Such things as 'Baby massage' and 'Stay and Play' contribute much to your children's development.

Everyone seems to get on well together at the centre and there are good opportunities to volunteer. We found out you have learnt new things and developed new skills. However, only some adults gain qualifications, go on to further training or find work. We have asked the centre to increase these opportunities, particularly for workless and low-income families. It has also recognised that there are insufficient activities for fathers.

Leadership is good. Leaders are always looking at ways to improve. They are endeavouring to make better use of data as they become available. We have asked the centre to improve this to help monitor the full impact of their services on the families with greatest need and set precise targets in their development plan for improvement.

Your contributions to the inspection were greatly appreciated and we would like to thank those of you who took the time to meet with us. Thank you for your willingness to talk with us about some of your personal experiences.

Best wishes to you and your families.

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