

Inspection report for Fairfield Children's Centre

Local authority	Derbyshire
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre workers, parents, a range of partner agencies, senior managers from the local authority and a local councillor. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Fairfield Children's Centre is a phase one centre. Previously it was a Sure Start centre which opened in 2006. The centre started providing a full range of services in 2009. It is situated on the Fairfield housing estate in Buxton, a town in the High Peak district in the north of Derbyshire. Services co-located on site include a doctor's surgery, a dental practice, a community hall, Fairfield Youth Centre and adult education. The centre fulfils its core purpose by offering a wide range of universal and targeted services with the support of key partners on site, at other venues and through outreach work. Childcare is provided by privately run services.

The reach area includes the villages of Tideswell, Dove Holes, Peak Dale and the surrounding rural areas. The majority of the population is of White British heritage; there has been a recent increase in the number of families settling in the area who are from Poland. The proportion of disabled children and disabled people and those with special educational needs is low. Recent figures show that the population of children aged from birth to five years of age is 745. Almost half of these families live in the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country. A quarter of the families live in workless households that are dependent on benefits. The majority of families live in rented accommodation.

Some children enter early years provision with skills and knowledge below those expected nationally for their age.

The centre manager is responsible for two centres in Buxton. This centre is one of nine centres in the High Peak and North Dales localities. Governance of the centre is provided by the local authority in conjunction with an advisory board which consists of a range of professionals and partners. The centre is open from 9am until 5pm, Monday to Friday, 52 weeks of the year. It also opens on occasional evenings and weekends to meet community users' needs.

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

Fairfield Children's Centre is a busy and vibrant centre which is very well used by the local community. Superb integrated working results in outstanding fully integrated partnerships. Consequently, care, guidance and support for families are excellent. A typical comment from a parent was, 'It is a great place to come because everyone is so helpful.' Provision is good. Services, activities and opportunities are well targeted at the needs of those who most need their help. The centre has engaged with a large majority of local children and families from its target groups. The centre is well known in the area and typically seen by many to be the 'heart' or 'hub' of the community.

This is an inclusive centre which has a high regard for diversity and addresses any inequalities well. Outreach work is a real strength and bespoke services are very successful. As a result, parents demonstrate high levels of satisfaction. Many described services as 'simply amazing'.

As a consequence of good leadership and management, most outcomes for children and their families are good. Attention to promoting safeguarding is given high priority. Health outcomes are variable and satisfactory overall. Despite good strategies and opportunities to encourage more healthy lifestyles, the proportion of children entering school who are obese is above the national average. The number of mothers smoking during pregnancy is high.

Children's progress in their learning and development is carefully tracked, and overall

achievements for those children who attend the centre's activities exceed national expectations. Effective early intervention ensures additional support is provided for children who are disadvantaged. Families thoroughly enjoy the activities offered by the centre, especially the good opportunities to play, learn and have fun together. Good strategies are used to encourage children to develop their independence, speech and language. Partnerships with most schools are excellent. The centre acknowledges that it does not yet do enough to help some children, particularly those whose circumstances make them vulnerable, to ensure they are ready for school. Where procedures are established to aid children's transition on to their next stage of learning, they have had good results. However, not all children in the centre's target groups are well prepared to cope successfully when they first start school.

Family learning encourages adults and their children to develop positive relationships. Good opportunities are available for the development of adult learning, and young parents are particularly well supported. Parents are truly valued and well established as partners, and they are regularly involved in decision making at the centre. Parents are actively involved in volunteering roles, several attend the parents' forum and are regular members of the advisory board.

The centre coordinator and highly competent centre workers are passionate about making a real difference to the lives of families in the area. Good local knowledge and data are used well to measure the impact of the centre's work and identify areas for further improvement. There is a clear, ambitious, shared vision for the future, and many firm plans are in place to promote further success. As a consequence, the centre demonstrates good capacity to improve.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Further improve outcomes by:
 - reducing the number of children in Reception Year who are obese
 - decreasing the percentage of mothers who smoke in pregnancy
 - improving children's readiness for school.

How good are outcomes for families?

2

The centre encourages families to sign the pledge to stop smoking, but the number of mothers smoking in pregnancy remains high. Breastfeeding is very well promoted, particularly by the 'Breast Mates' peer supporters, which has led to good results. The number of mothers who sustain breastfeeding is above the national average. Parents stated that attending the relaxing 'Baby Massage' has helped bonding with their babies and even reduced colic for some.

The programme to help families with young children improve their health through

good nutrition and exercise promotes positive outcomes well. Parents learn how they can prepare nutritious meals on a budget. They understand the importance of family meal times, portion sizes and which foods are high in fat, sugar or salt. Parents were able to describe adopting better routines by eating at regular times rather than constantly grazing. Some spoke of cutting down on take-away meals. Others stated they drink more water and eat more fruit. Parents said, 'The course helps you learn about different parenting styles and to understand yourself more so you can be a better parent.' Nevertheless, the obesity levels of children in the Reception Year remain stubbornly above the national average.

Parents all say they feel safe at the centre. The very effective 'Multi Agency Team' (MAT) strengthens and enhances the good work of the centre. Work with individual families whose circumstances make them vulnerable is particularly successful. The Common Assessment Framework is used well to support those families who are experiencing a range of difficulties. The impact of this sensitive, tailored early intervention work is excellent, and it prevents many complex situations reaching a crisis point. Parents are confident to come into the centre for help because they know and trust the centre workers. A typical comment from a parent was, 'I would not be where I am without the centre's help.'

Parents are confident to express their views and they treat each other with great respect. They could describe the positive behaviour strategies they now use to help their children understand how unkind words or negative behaviour makes them feel. As a result of training, parents are more confident to tackle issues as they arise appropriately and they are more inclined to explore children's feelings with them. Some parents now use rewards successfully to encourage positive behaviour and they described how this makes them feel less stressed.

Children's communication, language and literacy skills remain an issue for some. A range of appropriate strategies is in place to tackle this, and early indications of impact are positive. The data show that the achievement gap between the lowest 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest is slowly closing. However, the centre is not complacent and recognises it does not yet do enough work to ensure all children are ready and well prepared to enter school.

Adults have access to a wide range of learning opportunities to develop their basic knowledge and skills. Many make the gradual progression from one course to another and each achievement is well celebrated. Good opportunities are available to work as a volunteer, and effective support is in place for those who are willing to follow routes which can lead to employment.

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	2

concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	
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

The centre is ideal for families because a wide range of amenities are all based in one place. Smoking cessation sessions and a new phlebotomy clinic run frequently from the centre base. Childminders attend the centre often and they are well supported. Consequently, the reception area is constantly bustling.

Health services, such as antenatal sessions and the 'Tot Spot' baby clinic, help to promote healthy lifestyles. The uptake of immunisation is high, and the promotion of good dental health is strong. The popular 'Healthy Active Tots' (HAT) provision for children in the sports hall promotes purposeful physical play. Services are appropriately taken out to the more rural areas such as Tideswell when there is a demand for any specific activities. The centre's services are constantly under review to ensure they continue to meet the needs of their target families. Programmes and courses help to raise ambition and are tailored to meet users' needs well. The centre promotes involvement in exciting community events and has firm plans in place to use art as a tool for learning and more emotional engagement.

The centre regularly runs a variety of sessions to help parents support their children's early education. A rolling programme of family learning courses and sessions are in place, for example, 'Baby Massage', 'Little Explorers' and 'Family Cookery'.

The quality of care for families provided by the centre is excellent. A plethora of information is available for users of the centre, and displays are regularly changed to ensure they are up to date. Specific groups for fathers have increased their participation in the centre's activities. Effective partnerships with Charis House and Buxton Community School have enabled the 'Dad's Group' to have opportunities to work on a farm and learn construction skills.

Excellent work with a range of multi-agency partners ensures that they assess those who are most in need of intervention exceptionally well. The centre is an accredited member of the 'National Association of Child Contact Centres' and is used frequently for supervised family contact meetings.

The librarian facilitates the popular 'Baby Babble' sessions and encourages the sharing of books. Some parents have fed back that they now put regular time aside

to tell stories to their children and make them come alive by using props, such as puppets. The centre promotes the 'Bookstart' scheme well and runs 'Music, Story and Singing' sessions which further encourage the development of early communication.

Themed family sessions during the school holidays enrich children's learning and development and they include 'Positive Play' for targeted children. Police report incidents of crime are much lower when the centre runs themed activities or events such as the popular 'Ozbox'.

The Citizens Advice Bureau has regular appointments at the centre and their sessions are regularly fully booked. Effective advice is given to parents, particularly on issues around unemployment, housing, benefit and debt management. Local job vacancies are regularly advertised at the centre.

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

Governance and accountability arrangements are clear and understood. Day-to-day management and professional supervision systems are effective. Centre workers are continually honing their skills and developing their knowledge. There are clear links between strategic planning and the centre's individual business plan. Self-evaluation is predominantly accurate.

The relatively new centre coordinator is passionate about making a real difference to the lives of families. The highly skilled and experienced centre workers have embraced changes positively. They have developed outstanding relationships and partnerships with a wide range of agencies which promote excellent integrated provision, particularly for target groups. As a result, staff morale is high.

The centre coordinator is on the 'Vulnerable Child Panel' which helps keep her up to date with local issues. She knows the strengths of the centre and what needs to be done to secure further improvement. The centre has secured several small grants to increase and enhance resources. Cluster arrangements prevent the duplication of services and promote the sharing of human resources and provision, helping to secure good value for money.

Local families have good representation on the established advisory board. The centre strives for strong parental membership and manages to achieve this because

it acknowledges parents are significant partners and children are welcomed at its meetings. A few parents are confident to act as the chairperson. Parents regularly express their views, and their ideas are used constantly to shape services. Some young women have undertaken an impressive number of courses as members of the 'Fairfield Young Women's Group'. Parents also now lead a weekly 'Homework Club' and report that due to good support they are now better equipped to support their children.

The inclusion of all children and families is prioritised well. Extension of the centre's remit by the 'Multi Agency Team' means services are now inclusive of young people. 'All Stars' sessions, set up by a parent, runs from the centre providing a support group to help any parent who has a child with a disability. Crèche facilities enable those with young children to attend training. The growing numbers of families from Poland have received a warm welcome from the centre and effective support. Information is appropriately available in dual languages as required. The 'Nurture' group is evolving into the 'Get Ready for School' group to further promote children's readiness for school. Schools already engaging with this work are extremely positive about the impact on children's outcomes. The tailor-made sessions were stated to have a significant impact.

Good safeguarding practice is adopted across all areas of the centre's work. Recruitment and vetting procedures are robust. Parents develop a good understanding of how to keep their children and themselves safe through regular safety advice. The centre works extremely well with social care to ensure that those on the child protection register or looked after children receive the support they need. Case studies provide evidence of sensitive multi-agency work. Social care partners described the centre workers as being 'exceptionally insightful in their work and support of families'.

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	1

integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	
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

Ofsted reports relating to the childcare settings and schools in the reach area were scrutinised to provide additional contextual information.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Fairfield Children's Centre on 23 and 24 May 2012. We judged the centre as good overall.

Those of you we spoke to told us how much you enjoy attending the lively centre. You trust the centre workers and find them extremely helpful. We agree that the centre is a safe and welcoming place. We judged the quality of care, guidance and support, and partnerships to be outstanding.

The centre takes an active role in developing excellent partnerships with you and other agencies to ensure services meet your needs extremely well. Very effective partnership working enhances opportunities for families in the area and has a positive impact on outcomes. We agree that the centre and its partners provide you with a good range of opportunities to develop skills for life and more positive parenting. As a result, many of you have completed several courses, some of which are accredited. This progress in achievement has led to employment for some. We know several of you are volunteers which has developed your self-esteem and further strengthened the good work of the centre. It was a pleasure to see how many of you are actively involved in your centre's parents' forum and advisory board.

The centre is fully committed to helping you provide your children with the best possible start to life. The 'Nurture' group promoting children's readiness for school is successful. Firm plans are in place to develop this group further, and we have asked the centre to work with all its school partners to ensure that no child misses out on this good support.

You told us you particularly enjoy the sessions the centre runs such as 'Baby Massage', 'Messy Play' and 'Healthy Active Tots'. You enjoy the family learning courses such as the programme to help families with young children improve their

health through good nutrition and exercise. 'We can see from your evaluations how much you have learnt from attending this course. You told us how the course has helped you to learn about different parenting styles and to understand yourselves more so you can be better parents. We know many of you are keen to adopt more healthy and positive lifestyles which will have a significant impact on your families.

We have asked the centre to consider what more it can do to help you reduce the number of children who are overweight when they start school. We know you understand the importance of smoke-free homes. However, a high number of mothers in the area are still smoking during their pregnancy. We have asked the centre to look at further ways it can support you if you wish to cease smoking.

We would like to thank everyone who was willing to speak to us. We are very grateful for your help and wish you every success in the future.

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