

Inspection report for Falconwood Children's Centre

Local authority	Bexley
Inspection number	404408
Inspection dates	7–8 November 2012
Reporting inspector	Alan Comerford-Dunbar

Centre leader	Joanne Richards
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
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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 an additional inspector and an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with staff and senior leaders, parents and members of the advisory board. They met with a range of partners, observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Falconwood Children's Centre is a phase two centre which was designated in 2007. The centre operates in a cluster with three other centres within Bexley. The centre shares a joint timetable for the four centres; families are encouraged to attend activities at any of the centres.

The centre does not have its own bespoke building and therefore has to share use of the community centre with a number of other community related organisations. The centre provides the full core offer and a range of supporting services including health support, adult courses and educational workshops primarily for children. A range of services are delivered directly from the community centre, however, some services are delivered off-site and in association with other organisations.

Families living in the reach area are mainly White British with 93.8% of families in this group. The next largest group are of Indian heritage at 2.2%. The proportion of families with young children in poverty is 16.4% and the proportion of children attending school in the area who are known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. There are 12 lone parents registered at the centre in receipt of benefits. Currently, 14.3% of families in the area benefit from the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. The area has a mixture of housing although the majority of houses are privately owned.

Currently, 695 children under the age of five years live in the centre's reach area: of these 429 (62%) are registered with the centre. Children's skills, knowledge and abilities on entry to early years education are higher than expected for their age.

The centre leader has responsibility for Falconwood Children's Centre and one other centre within the cluster of four. The local authority is responsible for governance of the centre. The centre has an advisory board made up of representatives from the local community and professional agencies. The advisory board is responsible for two centres in the cluster.

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

Falconwood Children's Centre is a satisfactory centre that provides adequately for the majority of local families who achieve satisfactory outcomes overall. Centre staff make effective use of the community centre combining other community association activities with centre activities. This has proven popular for families, as one mother said, 'We are happy to bring our babies here because the centre is clean and well maintained.'

Enjoyment and achievement are good because children enjoy learning and make very good progress from their typically above average starting points; most exceed the levels expected for their age by the end of the Reception Year.

The centre manager works closely with staff, users and community partners to provide a varied range of services, activities and groups which meet the needs of those users who attend regularly. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about what the centre provides for them and their children. They have learned much about their children's learning and development from knowledgeable centre staff and from each other. The centre's overall effectiveness is satisfactory.

Some sophisticated data are being produced by the local authority; however a lack of

data analysis at a reach level hampers the centre's ability to evaluate its effectiveness objectively. This also restricts centre staff from focusing activities on specific target groups.

The centre has satisfactory capacity to improve. The centre's self-evaluation report accurately identifies strengths and weaknesses and the development plan correctly addresses many areas for improvements, for example the need to improve obesity profiles for Reception Year children. Staff morale is high and managers and staff are keen to provide a good service for families. Senior managers within the local authority are supportive, understand the issues facing the centre and are working closely with centre staff to improve services delivered at the centre. Performance is managed satisfactorily. Training has upskilled the staff so that they feel confident to give advice directly to centre users about a range of matters. Governance is satisfactory. However, the advisory board is not fulfilling all aspects of its role and does not sufficiently challenge the centre about its work.

Satisfactory support for further education and training, getting back to work or finding out about benefits entitlement is available for parents who request it.

Appropriate care, guidance and support promote parents' good understanding of how to keep themselves and their families safe. Satisfactory safeguarding arrangements ensure users' safety when attending groups held at the centre and in its outreach venues.

Families experiencing change and challenges in their lives receive appropriate targeted support in the home to help them overcome the difficulties they face. Positive relationships give families the confidence to ask for help with any concern or worry. Children behave well and get along well with each other and staff because they feel safe and secure. Parents make a good informal contribution to the centre's work through regular discussions. Annual surveys and post-activity evaluations are used appropriately to inform centre staff and aid them to make decisions about activities. However, too few parents are actively involved in shaping centre activities. For example, there is no parents' forum and no parents currently on the advisory board. Furthermore, there are too few parents acting as volunteers at the centre.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Press ahead with implementing the plans in place to analyse and use the data provided by the local authority and information from other sources to build an accurate picture of the reach area, with particular regard to target and other vulnerable groups, so that the centre can plan future activities clearly focused on better meeting identified needs.
- Improve the effectiveness of the advisory board by clearly establishing its role and responsibilities and the level of challenge it injects into decisions about the running of the centre.
- Widen the involvement of parents in the centre by increasing the use of parents

as volunteers, establishing an active parents' forum and ensuring parents are represented on the advisory board.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

Outcomes for families are satisfactory overall. Registrations at the centre have increased recently since the centre successfully introduced joint sessions where parents bring babies to visit the health visitor but older siblings are able to attend at 'Stay and Play' sessions. Parents are relaxed and enjoy the welcoming atmosphere in the knowledge that their babies and older siblings are happy. The number of mothers who breastfeed their babies at six to eight weeks has risen over the last two years and is similar to the national average. The proportion of children classified as overweight or obese at the end of the Reception Year fluctuates and was slightly above the national average last year. Health visitors are aware of the situation locally and are working closely and effectively with centre staff to pursue the actions in the centre's improvement plan although it is too soon to measure the impact of this work.

The vast majority of users who attend activities say that they feel safe and that their children are well protected. Parents are confident that they know what to do in an emergency. Accidental injuries in the reach area are well below national figures. A small number of children are subject to a child protection or child in need plan; staff are clear about their responsibilities when working with families at a time of crisis. Children and parents enjoy and achieve very well at the centre. The proportion of children achieving 78+ scale points by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage including in personal, social and emotional development and in communication, language and literacy is improving each year. Outcomes were well above the national average in 2011 at 71%. The gap between the lowest 20% and the rest is closing faster than the national rate and is narrower than the national average.

Children who come to one of the centre groups enjoy 'Sing and Rhyme' sessions. Parents speak positively about improvements to their child's speech, as one mother said, 'He speaks so clearly now.' The centre commissions a football coach who works enthusiastically with children who obviously love the energetic sessions. One parent said, 'The children's centre has great space, the football coach is absolutely brilliant; he always gets the best out of the children and is very professional.'

Children behave well during all activities run by the centre. Staff are good role models for parents who demonstrate that they are learning parenting skills as a result of clear guidance and support from staff. However, parents are not sufficiently involved in running the centre. Although parents informally give feedback to staff following sessions they attend, the centre does not have an active parents' forum, nor are any parents currently on the advisory board which governs the centre. Furthermore, not enough is being done to develop parents as future volunteers during centre activities.

Childminders are actively involved in working with centre staff to support families in the area. Parents, including fathers, attend a range of courses held at the centre to improve their parenting and other skills, with first aid and baby massage being the most popular. The centre offers opportunities for parents seeking to improve their employment chances through attendance at activities run at other centres. Parents seeking advice and guidance about employment are appropriately signposted to various partners' services, including a range of appropriate courses.

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	3
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	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	3

How good is the provision?

3

The range of activities, services and groups offered by the centre appropriately meets the needs of the majority of local families who engage with the centre. 'Theatre Bug' music activities effectively promote the communication skills of children who attend. Classes, such as 'Animagica', 'Magical Moves' and 'Baby Yoga' enable staff to meet with parents to give timely advice about child health, learning and development, and welfare needs. First aid courses help users to update their qualifications and improve essential skills. Activities and groups enable users to support each other. One parent expressed how groups have helped her and her child to make friends and how this has helped the transition to nursery. While the range of activities, services and groups is appropriate it does not fully meet the needs of families who live in the reach area because a significant number have not yet been accessing services. The quality of outreach services is satisfactory, however, the centre does not make sufficient use of data to analyse what it needs to do to better engage with identified target groups living within the reach area.

Adults' and children's learning is promoted purposefully. Parents enjoy joining in with their children's play and value being able to let their children play in the knowledge that they are safe. Children engage fully with a varied and plentiful range of toys..

Children learn to share resources amicably. Staff observe the children's play and note their learning. Staff identify the next steps for children's learning and provide additional resources to support and extend their play. Assessments under the Common Assessment Framework are appropriate and detail precisely the individual support the children and their parents should receive at activities held in the centre and in the home.

Users' well-being is given top priority. Care, guidance and support are appropriate. Staff know their families well. They are skilful in noticing any changes in mood and are quick to offer confidential and discrete support when they need to. The centre gives appropriate support to families in the home or at specific and tailored groups. Families receive good support during times of crisis. As one parent said, 'They are there for you when you need it most.'

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 leadership and management and overall effectiveness of the centre are satisfactory. There are appropriate links with other agencies, such as health services and community groups using the community centre. Good use is made of commissioned services to expand the activities on offer to families. Referrals to Jobcentre Plus are appropriate for those users requiring advice and guidance about employment. Partnerships are satisfactory.

Staff training is appropriately targeted towards developing staff skills and services further. Governance is satisfactory. Senior managers and staff are highly motivated and clear about the issues to be addressed to improve the delivery of services for families. Planning for improvement is satisfactory, but lacks clear and measurable targets specifically linked to meeting the needs of the most vulnerable groups in the reach area. Centre leaders acknowledge that not enough is yet done to evaluate the impact of the centre's work on target groups and to use data to plan more effectively to meet the needs of all groups in the area.

The centre staff establish good relationships with the families who come into the centre. Information about provision and outcomes for victims of domestic violence who have asked for help are recorded carefully. As a result, all those involved in supporting the most vulnerable families know this work is effective. The extent to

which the centre enables individual users to progress to further employment, education or training is satisfactory.

Senior leaders ensure a satisfactory range of enjoyable services are matched to the wants and needs of the families who use the centre. Value for money is satisfactory. Although outcomes generally are satisfactory and there is good informal engagement with users, managers are aware, however, of the need to extend the range of users to include more from vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups, such as families from workless households and lone parents.

The centre provides satisfactorily for equality and diversity. Equality of opportunity is given suitably high regard and all staff work to ensure that activities are inclusive. There is disabled access to the centre. The welcoming atmosphere within the community centre is something parents are particularly pleased with. As one mother said, 'It's great here; everyone makes you feel at home and safe.' Parents of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good support through a 'Mellow Mondays' group. One mother, whose child is autistic, summed up what the group meant to parents when she said, 'It really makes a difference here; you absorb advice from staff and other parents who are further along the journey than you are.'

Safeguarding arrangements, including all statutory requirements, are satisfactory, including those for child protection and looked after children. Criminal record checks are completed appropriately. The centre has clear policies for safer recruitment and risk assessment, which are appropriately implemented in practice. Safeguarding training is regular and up-to-date and staff are confident when dealing with safeguarding issues.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood	3
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	3
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	3
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	3
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	3
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	3

The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	3
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Any other information used to inform the judgements made during this inspection

Not applicable.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Falconwood Children's Centre on 7 and 8 November 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you for telling us about how much you and your children enjoy coming to the centre. Positive relationships with staff and each other help those of you who have a concern or worry to seek help quickly. Many of you told us how much you value the personal support you have been given from time to time and how you value the groups that take place.

The centre helps you and your families to keep safe by encouraging you to follow procedures for signing yourself and your children in and out of groups. A varied range of activities supports those of you who attend well but outcomes are currently satisfactory because a significant number of people living in the reach area are still not engaging with the centre's services, especially those from some target groups such as lone parents and workless families. We have asked the centre to make better use of data produced by the local authority. This is so that it can offer services which will support the most vulnerable families within the reach area.

Currently there are limited opportunities for you to contribute to the centre's work. We have recommended that the centre establishes a parents' forum, makes more use of volunteers within the centre and ensures parents are well represented on the advisory board.

An average proportion of mothers breastfeed their babies, but obesity levels in young children still give some cause for concern and the centre is working effectively to address this with health partners. There is satisfactory support to help those of you who are out of work to return to education, training or employment.

The centre manager gives positive and supportive leadership. She is assisted by a skilled staff team which offers appropriate care, guidance and support to help you

and your families improve your lives. This is especially so for those of you who experience challenges in your lives from time to time.

Your children learn very well and enjoy their learning. Many of you commented on how centre staff have helped you to become better parents, especially how to help develop your child's speech and language. Results from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profiles show that your children reach a good level of development and achieve above the national average.

Governance of the centre is satisfactory. The centre leader and her staff are well supported by senior managers from the local authority who are clear about the issues facing the centre. We have recommended that the centre develops the role and responsibilities of the advisory board so that it can effectively challenge and support the centre.

We understand why so many of you enjoy attending the centre and again wish to thank you for sharing your thoughts with us during our visit.

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