

Inspection report for Whalley Range Children's Centre

Local authority	Manchester City Council
Inspection number	386928
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Reporting inspector	Tara Street

Centre leader	Faheema Chunara
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable
Centre address	Whalley Range Sure Start Children's Centre Burford Road Whalley Range Manchester M16 8HE
Telephone number	0161 245 7007
Fax number	0161 274 7290
Email address	f.chunara@manchester.gov.uk

Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Honey Bear Nursery 500105

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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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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 additional inspector and one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with senior managers, centre staff, parents, members of the advisory board and a number of partners including health, education and children's social care professionals. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation including the centre's development plans, evaluations, key policies and the centre's equality and safeguarding procedures.

Information about the centre

Whalley Range Children's Centre is a phase two purpose-built centre situated adjacent to St Margaret's Church of England Primary School in Whalley Range, Manchester and was designated in September 2007. It offers a range of services to meet the core purpose which include child-health services, family play sessions, parenting programmes, adult education, family outreach services and a sensory room. The centre is open from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. A playgroup for disabled children and those with special educational needs is delivered on Saturdays from 1pm to 4pm through the Short Family Breaks services. The Whalley Range ward is made up of areas of affluent, middle class families and other areas which have larger pockets of deprivation. Of these, five of the seven Super Output Areas are in the 30% most disadvantaged areas and the other two fall under the 70% most deprived areas in Manchester.

There are 1045 children aged from birth to five years in the reach area, with 33% accessing services in the centre. Within the reach of the centre there are significant issues surrounding isolation, mental health, unemployment, domestic violence, substance misuse and low levels of literacy and numeracy. There is a diverse mix of residents and a significant Black and minority ethnic community, with 21% from a Pakistani ethnic group, many of whom speak English as an additional language. Housing is mostly privately owned with smaller pockets of social or private rental. Levels of unemployment are high, with 13% of children living in households dependent upon workless benefits, and many of the existing jobs are low paid. Most children enter early education with knowledge and skills that are slightly below

expectations for their age, particularly in communication, language and literacy, and personal, social and emotional development. There are links to three local primary schools. The centre's childcare provision is delivered by Honey Bear Nursery and is subject to separate inspection arrangements. The childcare was last inspected in December 2009. The report of this inspection is available on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Governance of the centre is provided by Manchester City Council in conjunction with an advisory board that includes providers, delivery partners and members of the local community, and users who attend the centre. The newly appointed centre manager came into post on 1 October 2012. The local authority is currently undergoing a significant service redesign.

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

Satisfactory leadership and provision promote satisfactory outcomes for children and families within the reach area. Parents who attend the centre value the support extended to them, particularly in times of crisis. Attention to safeguarding is a clear priority of all staff. Parents who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe at the centre and welcomed by staff who are very approachable and friendly. 'The staff are always nice and willing to help, no matter what it is. They never moan and are always pleasant or I wouldn't come back', is a typical comment expressed by parents who access the centre.

The centre encourages families to be more physically active and eat healthily, and this leads to satisfactory health outcomes. However, although the percentage of mothers sustaining breastfeeding at six to eight weeks has increased by 7% in the last year, the number initiating breastfeeding is not as significant and is well below the national average. Satisfactory links are in place with health partners and sessions such as the ante-natal and baby clinics are well attended. As a result, data show that 83.2% of children have been immunised in the reach area by the age of five years. Despite this work, the percentage of children in the Reception Year who are obese has increased to well above the national average and the rate of dental decay is also high.

There has been an increase in the proportion of children achieving 78+ scale points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile which reflects a good level of development and a narrowing of the achievement gap. However, the centre does not track children's learning and development in centre activities. Partnership working with local schools and childcare settings to develop programmes for school readiness are limited. Some adults who attend the centre are encouraged and supported in new learning through such courses as first aid and a 'Parent Survival' course. Other parents help to run groups such as the 'Stay and Play' sessions. However, the promotion and range of adult learning opportunities and volunteering is limited and only a small minority of adults gain relevant qualifications to help improve their economic well-being. Case studies show that some adults return to work or further training, but the centre does not have complete records of all users' progress or destinations.

The centre regularly seeks the views of families using the centre and uses these appropriately to shape services, including users' evaluations of activity sessions and feedback from the parents' forum. Parental membership on the advisory board is positive. However, due to significant changes in the management and staffing of the centre over the last year these meetings have not been held regularly. Many members have been newly appointed, which restricts the board's ability to effectively support and challenge the centre in driving improvement.

This centre promotes equality and diversity satisfactorily. It is an inclusive centre and all users feel welcome and valued. Sound systems are in place to assess the needs of those children and their families whose circumstances make them particularly vulnerable, such as those coping with poverty, mental health issues and domestic violence.

The newly appointed centre manager has quickly and appropriately identified the strengths and areas for development of the centre's work. She has clear plans in place to develop initiatives, some of which have already begun to be implemented. Satisfactory systems are in place for development planning, but the sharing and use of all available data, in conjunction with partners, to set challenging targets is not fully effective. This makes it difficult for the centre to monitor and demonstrate the full impact of its work on improving outcomes for families. The priorities being pursued focus on the need to increase both the registration and participation rates of all families and children engaging in the centre's services and activities, particularly lone parents, minority ethnic groups and fathers. However, these improvements have yet to have an impact and, therefore, the centre's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Improve outcomes by working with partners to:
 - increase the number of mothers initiating breastfeeding and reduce the number of children with dental decay and who those are obese in Reception Year

- improve the tracking of children's learning and development and develop programmes to support school readiness by working more closely with schools and childcare settings
- increase the promotion and participation rates in adult learning programmes and volunteering, progression into further education and employment, and further develop procedures to track and measure the centre's effectiveness in this area.

- Increase further the registration and participation of families and children engaging in the centre's services and activities, particularly minority ethnic groups, lone parents and fathers.
- Improve leadership and management further by:
 - developing the role of the advisory board and the frequency of meetings to further support the centre in driving improvement
 - strengthening self-evaluation processes and development planning by working with partners to share and make full use of all available data to set challenging targets that will help the centre to demonstrate the full impact of its work on improving outcomes over time.

How good are outcomes for families?

3

The centre has built sound links with health colleagues but outcomes are variable. The number of children accessing mainstream health services and the percentage being immunised have increased. There is satisfactory health promotion through leaflets, group activities, displays and during home visits. However, the percentage of mothers initiating breastfeeding, at 66%, is still well below the national average of 74.1%. A more positive picture is reflected in the number of these mothers who continue to breastfeed at six to eight weeks which has increased in the last year from 49% to 56%. The recent introduction of guest speakers at 'Baby Play' sessions is beginning to develop parents' understanding of what constitutes a healthy and safe lifestyle for their whole family. For example, the health team has recently visited to discuss weaning and the fire service promoted safety in the home and basic first aid. However, data show that the percentage of Reception-age children who are obese has remained stubbornly high over the last three years and currently stands at 14.3%, which is higher than the national average of 9.6%. In addition, local data show that the rate of dental decay in children is high at 69% compared to the Manchester average of 59%.

The coordination of the multi-agency work associated with those who are subject to a child protection plan and looked after children has resulted in greater stability and independence within the family home. The effective implementation of the Common Assessment Framework process underpins the initial assessment of need and the successful coordination of appropriate services. Staff have established trusting relationships with parents, who confidently share and discuss their issues. A typical comment from parents regarding the impact of individual support was, 'Everything was like hell for me and I couldn't cope. The staff were kind and responsible and referred me to many organisations for support

emotionally so that I forgot my bad experience.’ Staff provide parents with appropriate safety advice to help them gain a better understanding of how to keep their children safe.

Children behave well and most evaluations record increased levels in parents’ confidence. A parent who had attended the ‘Parent Survival’ course stated, ‘I am much calmer and I have a better atmosphere at home. I feel a better mum and my son is calmer.’ The ‘1-to-1 Support Services’ sessions enable any parents who feel low or isolated to build their confidence and self-esteem.

Data show that the percentage of children gaining at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile with at least six points in each of the scales for personal, social and emotional development, and communication, language and literacy has increased from 39.7% in 2009 to 56.5% in 2012, which is just below the national average of 64%. In addition, the achievement gap between the lowest 20% and the rest is slowly narrowing from 35.8% in 2009 to 32.1% in 2012. However, programmes to improve children’s transition to school, run in conjunction with local schools and other early years providers in the area, are limited. The centre does not currently track children’s learning and development to measure the impact of its work in this area.

Adults have access to a satisfactory range of courses which help develop their basic knowledge and skills, such as specific programmes for promoting parenting skills and English for Speakers of Other Languages. However, there is little evidence of the active promotion of, or increased participation rates in, adult learning programmes and volunteering and progression into further education and employment. In addition, the procedures to track and measure the centre’s effectiveness in this area, particularly when signposted to other providers, are limited.

Parents are confident in expressing their views and they treat each other with respect. Most families using the centre regularly express their views following specific sessions and some contribute to shaping services through membership of the growing parents’ forum and advisory board.

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	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
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How good is the provision?

3

Overall, parents and children receive a satisfactory quality of care, guidance and support. The centre offers an appropriate range of outreach services and activities which support users who attend to socialise with others in the community. For example, parents enjoy attending the 'Baby Play' groups and 'Chatterzoom' sessions which promote good early learning through fun and active play sessions. Registration and engagement at the centre are slowly increasing, with data showing an improving figure from this time last year, with 41% of local families currently engaged with centre services. However, the number of lone parents, minority ethnic groups and fathers participating are lower than other groups.

Resources throughout the centre are of good quality. A satisfactory range of literature, some in different languages, provides parents with valuable information about sexual health and domestic violence. Parents who attend the centre confirmed the inspectors' findings and told them that activities are interesting, give them confidence, help support their children's learning and appropriately promote their parenting skills.

The centre works in close partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau to deliver weekly drop-in sessions to support parents with housing, benefits and debt management advice. Those wishing to find employment can view job vacancies displayed on the information board in the reception area. A programme of family learning courses is tailored to meet some users' needs. Attendance is satisfactorily monitored but the systems in place to track adults' progression into further education or employment are underdeveloped.

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 new centre manager and her skilled team, including commissioned services, are optimistic about the future despite the challenges they have faced due to recent changes. They are committed to extending services and providing the best life chances for local children and their families. Governance is supportive and the advisory board is keen to act as a critical friend in holding the centre to account for improving its work. However, advisory board meetings have not been held regularly due to significant changes in the management

and staffing of the centre over the last year, and many members, including the Chair, have been newly appointed. As a result, this has impacted on the board's ability to effectively support and challenge the centre in driving improvement. Day-to-day management arrangements are clear and understood.

There are clear links between the centre's evaluation of its services and the priorities set out in its development plan. However, more work remains to be done to work with partners; for example, to share and make full use of all available data to set challenging targets that will help the centre to demonstrate the full impact of its work on improving outcomes over time.

Recruitment and vetting procedures for all staff and partner agencies are robust and security at the centre is good. Early intervention and support for the emotional health and well-being of families is effective. Staff attend regular safeguarding training and there is multi-agency cooperation which results in children and families being well protected. Good support is provided for some families experiencing domestic violence or mental health issues. However, only a minority are accessing these beneficial services.

Partnerships with parents are developing well and their evaluations of services are appropriately used to improve services. A childminder drop-in session is offered weekly and the centre actively promotes the use of a story bag and library scheme. The centre has recently liaised effectively with its linked childcare provider, Honey Bear Nursery, to offer a weekly play session where children enjoy exploring the sensory room and learning resources.

Equality and diversity issues are promoted satisfactorily and the centre's procedures meet all requirements. Most staff speak confidently about families' differing cultures and their growing understanding of known barriers which prevent some families from engaging with the centre's services. Bilingual staff and volunteers offer effective support for some families. Families with disabled children, and those with special educational needs, are encouraged to attend the 'Saturday Short Family Breaks' club or the 'Family Art' club which are offered at Moss Side Children's Centre. The centre recognises the important role fathers play in their child's development but the number of fathers attending the centre is low, as is the number of lone parents and those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Taking all this into account, the centre provides satisfactory value for money.

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 secures 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

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

The childcare provision at Honey Bear Nursery was inspected in December 2009. The inspection of the children's centre was informed by the findings and judgements of this inspection.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Whalley Range Children's Centre on 14 and 15 November 2012. We judged the centre as satisfactory overall.

Thank you very much for talking to us and letting us come into your sessions. The information you gave and the stories you shared with us helped us to make our judgements. We also looked at the comments you made on feedback sheets and evaluations.

The centre has undergone a great deal of change during the year. Despite this, it has continued to provide a safe place for those of you who access the centre. It is somewhere you can be sure of a warm and friendly welcome. The new manager and her team are fully committed to making improvements to the lives of families in the area.

The centre provides you with satisfactory opportunities to engage in enjoyable and purposeful learning experiences. Those of you we spoke to told us how much you enjoy attending the centre. You trust the centre workers and find them very helpful. However, we noted that only a small percentage of families are registered at the centre and attend regularly. Therefore, we have asked the centre to look at ways it can encourage more local

families to access activities and benefit from the services that it provides for you, particularly lone parents, minority ethnic groups and fathers.

The number of mothers choosing to breastfeed babies is low and dental decay in young children is high. We have asked the centre to work closely with their health partners to ensure those of you who choose to breastfeed are given effective support and to develop strategies to increase awareness about good dental health. You told us you particularly enjoy the 'Baby Play' sessions and groups such as 'Baby Massage', 'Chatterzoom' and 'Stay and Play' which encourage bonding with your babies and enable you to be more active. Despite these opportunities to increase your physical activity, the number of children in the Reception Year who are obese is high. Therefore, we have asked the centre to work closely with their partners to further encourage more healthy lifestyles to help reduce obesity and promote children's healthy weight.

Partnerships are developing and are particularly strong with family support workers. We have asked the centre to work on improving all partnerships to make sure all services work better together to meet your needs. In particular, to track children's learning and how well they develop, and to work with local schools and childcare providers to help ensure your child is well prepared for taking the next step in their education.

You were positive about the impact of the parenting courses some of you have attended. Some of you told us how you now encourage more positive behaviour in your children with praise and attention. We know some of you are interested in having important roles as volunteers which will further strengthen the work of the centre. We have asked the centre to find ways to increase the range of volunteering and adult learning opportunities available to you and to increase the number of adults who gain qualifications to go on to further training or employment and to become financially secure.

The centre has begun to prioritise improvement in their development plans. However, the sharing and use of all available data, in conjunction with partners, to set challenging targets is less effective, so we have asked the centre to improve this. This will enable the centre to monitor where it is making a difference and where more work needs to be done.

Some parents are asked to share their views about the centre's activities and you are encouraged to contribute to the decision making and governance of the centre through attending advisory board meetings and the parents' forum. However, due to the significant changes in the management and staffing of the centre over the last year advisory board meetings have not been held as regularly as they need to be. Many members have been newly appointed, including the Chair, which reduces the board's ability to effectively support and challenge the centre in driving improvement. Your centre has been asked to improve this and we hope that some of you will be interested in getting involved in both the parents' forum and the advisory board in the future.

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.