

Fairway Children's Centre

1 The Fairway, Mill Hill, London, NW7 3HS

Inspection date 2–3 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
Access to services by young children and families		Requires improvement	3
The quality of practice and services		Requires improvement	3
The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for children and families

This is a centre that requires improvement. It is not good because:

- The number of local families who use the centre, although rising, is not high enough to ensure that the large majority of those who need help the most benefit from the good care, guidance and support the centre offers. This is particularly the case for some families living in the most disadvantaged community.
- The local authority and the centre do not have sufficiently recent or accurate information about some of the different groups in the area. Consequently, there is not a clear picture about how many from specific groups, such as lone parents, are attending and what services will best fit their requirements. Not enough has been done to find out why the number of families who attend from the most disadvantaged area is relatively low.
- The advisory board and the governing body are supportive and proud of what the centre has achieved. However, they and the local authority are not yet challenging or questioning enough in relation to why some families do not access services and what the impact of the centre's work is on those who do.
- The centre's improvement targets, set by the local authority, are not specific enough to ensure its work is aimed at increasing participation in the centre's services by families of some of the key groups, such as those from its most disadvantaged community.

This children's centre has the following strengths:

- The one-to-one early help that families receive, often when they have multiple and complex problems, is very effective. Parents speak very highly of the staff and of the outcomes they have achieved for them across many aspects of their lives, summed up by one parent stating, 'I can't praise the centre enough. I wish it was open all the time.'
- Well-established and mutually supportive partnerships with the school, health services and other local groups ensure that parents are helped to give their children a healthy lifestyle and a confident start at school.
- Reducing the risk of harm to children, especially the most in need, permeates the work of the centre. Recent improvements to information sharing, especially in relation to the most vulnerable children, and strong multi-agency involvement mean that individual families who have been identified as needing support receive the help they require.
- Everyone is made to feel very welcome; parents greatly appreciate the lovely playrooms and great indoor and outdoor resources. Monthly Sunday Stay and Plays and Dads' evening football have successfully attracted fathers and working parents, so they can benefit from the centre's services.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of this children's centre was carried out under Part 3A of the Childcare Act 2006 as amended by the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009.

This inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre manager, the headteacher and other staff, officers from the local authority, representatives from the health services and several other partners working with the centre. Inspectors met parents and representatives of the governing body and advisory board. The inspectors visited several activities, including one jointly with the centre manager who, along with the deputy centre manager, also attended all team meetings. They looked at the centre's self-evaluation, business plan, a sample of case studies, safeguarding policies and procedures and a range of other relevant documentation.

Inspection team

Joan Lindsay	Additional Inspector, Lead Inspector
Steven Nelson	Additional Inspector
Lesley Talbot-Strettle	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about the centre

This phase two stand alone centre opened in 2010. It delivers or supports access to a range of services to meet its core purpose. Midwifery and other health services are delivered directly from the centre. The building is open 48 weeks of the year, Monday to Friday from 8.00am. until 6.00pm. Services are also delivered in the community from Mill Hill library. The centre is attached to Fairway School whose governing body manages it on behalf of the local authority. The school and co-located registered day care managed by the centre are subject to separate inspections.

There are 1,852 children under five years of age in the reach area. Children enter early years provision at levels slightly below those expected for their age. The centre serves 17 areas of varying need, although only one ranks in the 30% most deprived. One of the most affluent areas in Barnet is located in the north of the reach area. Housing is mixed, with some rented social housing and privately-owned houses, flats and maisonettes. The unemployment rate locally is a very low 2.27%. Families from White British heritage backgrounds account for 54% of the population, with the second largest group, 18%, being Asian. There are also an increasing number of families from Eastern Europe and a large Jewish community. The centre has identified its specific target groups as children and families with additional needs, those who have English as an additional language, fathers and other male carers, and families from the most deprived areas.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Increase the engagement of local families, especially those from the most disadvantaged area and use this information to adapt services and outreach work to better meet their needs.
- Work with the local authority to improve the accuracy and availability of data relating to the centre's identified target groups. Make use of this to clarify and monitor which local families are using children's centre services and to find out why some are not.
- Improve the level of challenge from the advisory board, the governing body and the local authority so that they hold the centre to account by:
 - increasing governors' and advisory board members' understanding of the information used to measure the centre's impact
 - using this information to define targets that are measurable and that relate specifically to this centre and the impact of its work with its identified key groups.

Inspection judgements

Access to services by young children and families

Requires improvement

- Centre activities, such as Stay and Play, are very popular; but, of those who attend, only about half are local families. Recent changes to the local authority's data systems have meant that some of the information about key target groups and how many are using the centre has only recently been made available.
- Where the engagement of the centre's identified key target groups is accurately measured, such as children with special needs and families who speak English as an additional language, the centre has successfully provided services to meet their needs, through groups such as Happy Families and Let's Talk Together.
- The number of families benefiting from centre services living in its most disadvantaged area is increasing but currently too low. The centre's reach area is cut through by major roads making access inconvenient for some, and the centre's recent use of a Playbus to take services out into the community is a strategy to overcome this barrier. However, not enough work has been done to ascertain why numbers are low from certain parts of the community, such as determining the impact its charging policy may have on low income families.
- Regular antenatal, postnatal and child health checks held at the centre, as well as much appreciated

breastfeeding advice, mean that expectant mothers and families have good access to early childhood services. Strong partnerships ensure that families who need additional support are referred to the centre.

- The effective links established with local schools, day care and early years providers by the children's centre teacher mean that the centre has been successful in supporting free entitlement to early education, especially for disadvantaged two-year-olds. Currently, 30 children are benefiting from this, with almost half in the day care managed directly by the centre. Overall, most children in the reach area take up early education.
- 'The centre always finds a way to help me.' This reflects how, where individual vulnerable families are identified or referred to the centre, staff are adept at not only matching specialist services to meet their needs, for example to support children with disabilities, but in establishing families' trust and confidence to ensure the large majority benefit from this.

The quality of practice and services

Requires improvement

- The popularity of many of the activities held at the centre and at Mill Hill library is testament to their quality. The range, including Sunday and evening sessions and specific activities for key groups, meets the needs of those who work, the large Jewish community and some of the centre's target groups. However, as the centre is not monitoring attendance of all its target groups and the numbers attending from the local area are generally lower than those coming from further afield, the relevance requires improvement.
- The impact of the centre's work on improving families' economic well-being and skills is not consistently monitored, especially in the longer term. Unemployment levels are very low in the reach area, but the centre has not done enough to identify what other training or educational needs their identified key groups or, for example, lone parents may have. Where there is specific support given, such as from the Citizens' Advice Bureau, this has had a positive impact on families who are referred especially for benefits and housing advice.
- Children are confident and prepared well for school because there is a strong focus on their early development from well-qualified staff. Parents' skills in helping their children learn and behave well are enhanced by staff who encourage their involvement and role model how to do this very well. Tracking of children, including the most vulnerable, shows that a large majority makes good progress. This is also evident from the Early Years Foundation Stage profile results for the reach area which show consistently better results than seen nationally.
- Health outcomes for families are only available borough wide, but all show good results, such as very high breastfeeding rates and immunisation levels of over 90%. Families feel they are helped to give their children a healthy and safe start to life through parenting courses and learning important skills such as paediatric first aid.
- Case files for families receiving one-to-one support or where other organisations are involved, such as through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process, are comprehensive and maintained to a high standard. Where families have turned to the centre, often where there are major traumas in their lives, they are given high levels of non-judgemental care, guidance and support which have a very positive impact on their lives.
- Parents are supportive of the centre and of each other; comments, such as 'everybody knows your name', reflect this. Views from the informal parents' forum meetings are acted on and passed on by the parent representatives of the advisory board, leading to improvements such as air conditioning in the sunspace area and changing the times of sessions to suit those with school-age children. There are currently no official volunteers in the centre, but parents are willing helpers such as when preparing fruit snacks for children.

The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management

Requires improvement

- The advisory board includes a good variety of partners, such as health representatives and Barnet library service. The board and the governing body hold the centre in high regard but have not drilled

down to measure how effective the centre is in supporting the families who need help the most and in questioning the centre about why some families are not accessing services.

- The local authority is reviewing its monitoring practice as the current targets set in the business plan are not specific enough in relation to the centre's identified key groups and how effective the centre is in supporting them. Although there have been recent improvements to the amount of data children's centres receive, there are still gaps in what is available to enable individual centres to have accurate reach-specific information about children and families.
- Day-to-day leadership and management by the centre manager and deputy are good; staff are experienced and well trained, especially in aspects of keeping families safe such as in how to support them where there are mental health or domestic abuse issues. Robust safeguarding policies, procedures and practices, including information sharing with the co-located school and day care, ensure that the most vulnerable families, including children subject to child protection plans, are supported very effectively. Staff are very swift to act when they identify concerns.
- The building and the resources are of high quality and staff are used well across the two sites. Specific equipment requirements and staff training to meet the needs of children with special educational needs or disabilities are much appreciated by parents. For example, staff have been trained in Makaton signing, and parents have been given resources to help their children at home. The collaborative work of the children's centre teacher and the special educational needs coordinator ensures that staff are skilled in identifying and supporting families where additional help is needed.
- Parents are frequently asked to evaluate services and returns show that they have a very high regard for the centre and how it helps their families. A recent independent survey of what children especially enjoy has been incorporated into session planning so that there are now more painting, gluing and soft play activities.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	Practice consistently reflects the highest aspirations for children and their families and as a result inequalities are reducing rapidly and gaps are closing.
Grade 2	Good	Practice enables most children and their families to access good quality services that improve children's wellbeing and achieve the stated outcomes for families.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	Performance is not as good as it might reasonably be expected to be in one or more key areas.
Grade 4	Inadequate	The needs of children and families in its area are not being met and/or the leaders and managers are not providing sufficient challenge to bring about improvement to the quality of services.

Unique reference number	21132
Local authority	London Borough of Barnet
Inspection number	421459
Managed by	The governing body of Fairway School on behalf of the local authority

Approximate number of children under five in the reach area	1,852
Centre leader	Sue Sharp
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0208 359 3742
Email address	suesharp@fairwaycc.barnetmail.net

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