

# Featherstone Children's Centre

29 Highcroft Road, Erdington, Birmingham, B23 6AU

<b>Inspection dates</b>	16–17 July 2015
<b>Previous inspection date</b>	8–9 March 2011

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>Previous inspection:</b>	Satisfactory	3
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:

- Too few families participate in services and activities on a regular basis or sustain contact with the centre over time, although the majority of those registered benefit well from its services.
- Not enough families of two-year-old children have taken up their free entitlement to a pre-school place. The local authority is working with the centre to help ensure sufficient, consistently good quality provision across the locality.
- Work to assess and track children's progress and development from ages two to five is in its infancy. The children's centre teacher is working with other education partners to resolve this.
- Systems to track the progress that children make at the centre, and their achievements, do not enable leaders to demonstrate the full impact of the centre on improving outcomes over time.
- Some good quality and well-planned initiatives for improving the centre's work have been developed over the past year, but have only been implemented recently and have still to have full impact.
- The local authority is still in the process of re-negotiating some agreements with partners to ensure sufficient data is provided to centres so that they can show the full impact of their work over time.
- Parents are not yet well enough represented in the management and governance of the centre.

### This centre has the following strengths:

- Centre staff ensure a well-maintained environment within the centre itself and its satellite centres in which families feel safe and can learn and develop with confidence.
- The centre has a good programme for adult learning and the promotion and encouragement of volunteering to help support them and their potential for future employment.
- Good and improving inter-agency partnership working is enabling the centre's services and activities to make a positive difference to the lives of some children and families.
- Parents enjoy a good range of opportunities which help to improve their parenting skills, and enhance their self-esteem and confidence.
- Families praise the ways they are engaged with the centre and the support it provides for them.
- Centre leaders and staff focus firmly on the promotion of 'tolerance' and 'diversity' as universal (as well as British) values.
- The leadership, management and governance of the centre is ambitious for success and is having a

positive impact on improving the lives of children across the locality.

### What does the centre need to do to improve further?

- Extend and develop further the centre's much improved partnerships with health, and with private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings to ensure:
  - that children under the age of five, and their families, are reached and registered more effectively, and that their levels of engagement with the centre are increased
  - that all the centre's newly introduced initiatives with its various partners, are established fully and in place at the latest within the next three months
  - the numbers of children and families engaged regularly in activities, groups and services are increased in order to improve the life chances and outcomes for even more families.
- Work with the local authority to ensure improving access to the free and funded places available for two year olds in the area so that:
  - sufficient quality places are available for the children before the end of the current financial year
  - there is the effective coordination of assessments between the ages of two to five in order to help accelerate further children's learning and development.
- Ensure the full introduction, by September 2015, of the centre's new systems to track and assess children's developmental progress more consistently from their starting points, so that:
  - the centre may measure better how well children make progress as a result of centre-led activities, and that staff always keep track of how well children achieve over time
  - centre staff may build more effectively on their improving use of data to analyse the needs of children and families even more effectively and help target services accurately.
- That the local authority secures effective service level agreements with its key partners to ensure the full sharing of data so that children's centres are able to demonstrate the full impact of their services to and for families.
- Extend parents' involvement in the running of the centre through a Parents' Forum, and their governance of the centre by increasing their representation on the advisory board.

## 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 five additional inspectors.

The inspectors held meetings with the children's centre leader, senior leaders from the local authority, members of the centre's staff and leadership team, and representatives of the locality's advisory board including its chairperson. They met and held discussions with education leaders and health professionals, early intervention and family support workers, early childhood providers, health and social care professionals, providers of commissioned services, parents and centre users.

The inspectors visited services and activities at Featherstone Centre itself, and at all the centre's satellite sites: Osborne Children's Centre; Barney's Children's Centre; Pype Hayes Children's Centre; Erdington Hall Children's Centre. These included visits to the Little Stars group and the 'Musical Babies' activity. Joint observations were undertaken with centre staff of 'Stay and Play' activities, a Baby Signing class, and a Baby Club.

Inspectors observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation. Case files were scrutinised with centre staff. Senior centre and local authority staff attended team meetings.

## Inspection team

Lead inspector Michael Miller	Additional inspector
Maggie Fobister	Additional inspector
Qaisra Shahraz	Additional inspector
Karen Cooper	Additional inspector
Judith Elderfield	Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about the centre

Featherstone Children's Centre consists of five Children's Centres; Featherstone itself is a phase one children's centre, its satellite centres, Osborne, Pype Hayes, Erdington Hall and Barney's are all phase two children's centres. These centres are all located on school sites. Featherstone is the lead body and the hub site with the other sites all linked under one integrated leadership and governance structure. As there is a fully integrated leadership of the locality, all staff across the locality are employed by the lead body (Featherstone Children's Centre).

Since its last inspection in 2011, the centre was, for a short time, merged with the others as the Erdington Group, and was inspected as part of this group in July 2014. In December 2014, the Erdington Group was disbanded, and Featherstone Children's Centre reverted to its original status as a stand-alone centre; its satellite centres were merged with it.

However, further changes are planned following the local authority review of early years provision across Birmingham. Pending further reorganisation, from April 2016, the centre is being led by the headteacher of Featherstone Nursery School. To avoid confusion, the centre has remained known to its parents and families as the 'Erdington Locality of Children's Centres'.

There are 4768 children under five in the locality. The locality has a slightly above average proportion of teenage and young mothers, and lone parents. Children's skills and knowledge when they enter early years provision vary across the area, but are broadly typical for their age.

The centre serves an urban area of north-west Birmingham which is socially diverse. However, almost all of the population live in one of the 30% most disadvantaged areas nationally and there are some pockets which fall into the 5% most deprived nationally. Levels of unemployment and the proportion of families dependent on benefits are above the national average.

Just under half of the population in the centre's area are of White British heritage. The majority come from other heritage groups, mainly Pakistani, Caribbean and African. Other ethnicities include: Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Asian, White/Asian, Polish and Romanian.

The centre's target groups are minority ethnic families; young parents, lone parent families and families eligible for nursery education funding for two-year-old children; workless families and those with financial concerns; families with disabled children or parents; and families where there may be domestic abuse or mental health issues.

## Inspection judgements

### Access to services by young children and families

### Requires improvement

- Featherstone Children's Centre is much valued by the families benefiting from its services. However, there remains too large a proportion of families who are not actively engaged with the range of activities and services. Although the large majority of children aged 0-5 years are registered with the centre, the level of their families' sustained engagement with the centre over time is inconsistent.
- The move to incorporating Featherstone as part of a wider group of children's centres did not prove a success. Over the past year, and since the centre reverted to its former status and took on the satellite centres, the centre leader and the local authority have been working well together to strengthen the centre's effectiveness; they have shown good capacity to do so. General access to services for families in the locality has improved over the last 15 months.

- Centre staff, in partnership with their local authority improvement partners, have been making good use of improved data from the local authority, and their local knowledge, to target services. This is now starting to have impact, but has yet to be tested fully over time. Ensuring that at least the large majority of families are engaged with its services remains a priority for the centre.
- The large majority of three- and four-year-olds access their early education entitlement. The number of two-year-old children eligible for free education who have taken up their entitlement has improved steadily over the past 15 months. However, around a half of two-year-olds known to the centre have yet to secure a place at an early years setting.
- Access to parenting programmes at the centre and its satellite settings is good. Volunteering opportunities to help individuals get back to work are particularly good. Unemployed adults have helpful access to advice and guidance relating to employment; opportunities for adult education to support this are particularly good. There is an excellent partnership with the Community Advocacy Support Advisor (CASA) service to provide, for example, legal and housing support and advice.
- The centre's settings all provide safe and welcoming environments. Staff know and understand well the local community and the needs of its target groups. They provide good quality holistic support to workless and vulnerable families and those requiring additional support. This is encouraged by the centre's firm commitment to equality and inclusion, and its celebration of cultural diversity.

### The quality of practice and services

### Requires improvement

- The centre and its satellite settings deliver an appropriate balance of activities and services. Parental confidence in the centre and its staff, and the quality of services and support provided for their children and families, is good. This is because activities are being planned effectively to reduce inequalities and improve the lives of children and families from priority target groups.
- The proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage has increased but remains below the national average. The gap between the least advantaged children and their peers, while narrowing, remains too wide.
- The centre and its specialist teacher are focused well in its work with parents to help improve the proportion of five year olds who gain a good level of development overall. New initiatives, and tracking systems, have been developed to help leaders to demonstrate the actual progress children make. However, these systems for tracking children's learning and progress both at the centre itself, and from the ages of two to five with education partners, are not yet securely or fully in place.
- There is good use of casework and a multi-agency approach to ensure that there is timely contact with the most vulnerable children and families. There is particularly good work with children subject to child protection plans and for children in need.
- The centre is developing an increasingly good network of services and partners to provide families with vital support and to help improve the health and well-being of children. The needs of young or lone parents, those from workless families or with financial concerns, families suffering from domestic abuse and children with disabilities and special educational needs access good quality support at the centre and through its specialist partners.
- Until recently the local authority has had difficulty in obtaining information and data from some of its partners across the authority, including from health and employment. This situation has improved significantly over the past year, both strategically at a local authority level and practically for the centre across its locality.

- Some working practices have also improved in the current financial year, for example the ways home visitors and midwives work together with mothers before a birth. This is helping to increase registrations and ante-natal contact with families. Nevertheless, the local authority is still working, on behalf of its children's centres, to secure improved service level agreements with its key partners. This is to ensure the full sharing of data and other information so that children's centres are able to demonstrate the full impact of their services for children and families.

### **The effectiveness of leadership, governance and management**

### **Requires improvement**

- The centre's planning for development and improvement is progressing well. It has identified its key priority groups correctly. It has introduced priority themes in its action planning to ensure that its key targets are met. Data on families and the centre's work is starting to be used increasingly effectively. The centre leader is helping to develop a more strategic approach to the centre's work. This is also reflected well in the determination to increase engagement levels.
- Reviews of the group's performance by the centre leader and the local authority improvement partners are thorough and accurate. Together they identify the centre's strengths and the steps needed to improve further the range and quality of services, and families' access to them. Development planning is focussed on the right priority areas.
- Leaders at all levels have responded positively and have taken appropriate action to improve the provision over the past year. An advisory board is well-established, and both challenges and supports well the work of the centre. The professional expertise of the board's members is contributing positively to the centre's good capacity to improve further.
- However, although there is some parental representation on the advisory board parents are not yet involved sufficiently in the centre's governance. The centre makes good efforts to survey its families about their views, and takes these on board as appropriate to help adapt services. Nevertheless, it has not been successful in creating a parents' forum in order to fulfil its aim of involving its families in the centre's decision making and improvement planning.
- The centre runs smoothly, and the staff are well-qualified. Until recently there have been some staffing problems, with the centre having to use agency staff, and some budget cuts. However, the current, more permanent team of staff have gelled well, and this is recognised by parents. Practical systems for supervision, performance management and the development of staff are all firmly in place and working well. The centre's resources are used effectively to support its families.
- Safeguarding arrangements and policies meet requirements. Staff and volunteers are safely recruited, checked and are well-trained. Staff understand the wider issues around safeguarding children and families. The ways the centre's team monitors and records their work in support of families, particularly those who may be more vulnerable, is a strength of the centre's work.

**What inspection judgements mean**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Description</b>
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.



**Children's centre details**

<b>Unique reference number</b>	21151
<b>Local authority</b>	Birmingham
<b>Inspection number</b>	456455
<b>Managed by</b>	The Featherstone Nursery School on behalf of the local authority

<b>Approximate number of children under five in the reach area</b>	4768
<b>Centre leader</b>	Elaine Dupree
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	08 March 2011
<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 6753408
<b>Email address</b>	enquiry@feathern.bham.sch.uk

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