

Inspection report for Burnage Children's Centre

Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	20505
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Gill Jones HMI

Centre governance	Management Advisory Board
Centre leader	Wendy Burton
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Green End Primary School St Bernard's RC Primary School
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Burnage Sure Start day care nursery Burnage community play group

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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.

An inspection of the registered early years/childcare provision was carried out at the same time as the inspection of the centre under Section 3 of the Childcare Act 2006. The report of this inspection is available on our website www.ofsted.gov.uk

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Early Years Inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with centre staff, health professionals, local community partners, user groups and parents.

Information about the centre

Burnage Children's Centre is situated in a mainly residential area. The centre was originally a purpose built day-care nursery, managed by the local authority. The day-care nursery takes children from within the Burnage reach area and from further afield, including from outside the city of Manchester.

Burnage became a Sure Start Phase 1 children's centre in 2006. It is on a campus with St Bernard's RC Primary, Green End Primary and Burnage High School for Boys and a community sports facility, 'Spaces'. The centre provides nursery, pre-school and health services to families and children in the Burnage area. The head of centre has management responsibility for two other local centres.

Statistical data for the Burnage reach area indicate that the centre serves a population who experience high social and economic disadvantage. The proportion of families from minority ethnic groups is increasing and the number of single parents within the district is more than double that found nationally. On entry to the nursery, children's development varies considerably, reflecting the wide range of groups who choose to use its service. However, the proportion of children with skills below those expected for their age is greater than is usually found.

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 users and the wider community

4

Capacity for sustained improvement

The centre's capacity for sustained improvement, including the quality of its leadership and management

4

Main findings

Despite some positive features, the overall effectiveness of Burnage children's centre is inadequate. Leaders and managers do not demonstrate a clear understanding of the purpose of this phase 1 children's centre. Consequently, it does not provide the full core offer for children and families in its reach area. For example, information, guidance and support for parents and carers who wish to consider training and employment are not available. Outcomes for children and families are poor. This is because the provision on offer is limited and insufficiently targeted to those most in need. Leaders of the centre do not use the available information well enough to ensure that they work strategically to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children and adults in the locality. Development planning and self-evaluation are weak. Therefore, the capacity for sustained improvement is inadequate.

Only a very small proportion of families who access the centre's activities live in the reach area. This means that, although some outcomes for users are satisfactory or better, the centre is not improving outcomes overall for the community it should serve. For example, the percentage of children in the reach area who attain the nationally expected levels for five-year-olds is well below average, and is in decline. Local primary schools report that some children are starting school with previously unidentified social, emotional and learning needs. These children have not received early intervention in accordance with the 'continuum of need' policy set out by Manchester local authority. They have slipped through the net.

The children and families who regularly use the centre are learning to lead healthy lifestyles. The 'Children and parents survival' courses in particular are helping families to develop emotional resilience. Users enjoy these activities; they learn new skills and make a positive contribution to the community. However, vulnerable adult users are not safe from harm because the care, guidance and support from the centre to

safeguard their well-being are inadequate. The centre fails to respond appropriately to users facing challenging circumstances. Examples of adults gaining qualifications and/or employment to improve their economic well-being are extremely rare.

The centre's provision is inadequate. The centre does not keep accurate records of who attends activities and does not evaluate how well it is meeting users' needs. Partner organisations commissioned by the local authority make a satisfactory contribution to promoting users' learning and development. These include antenatal care and a service to develop parenting skills, the Children and Parents Survival (CAPS) which is part of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. Some partners can demonstrate clearly the positive impact of their work on the outcomes for children and families in the city of Manchester. However, their impact on the children and families within the Burnage reach area is less certain. This is partly because the centre does not have access to information held by the Primary Care Trust (PCT) on live births. But it is also because the centre does not request any information directly from its partners. Consequently, although provision for individual families may well be satisfactory or better, partnership service leaders report that they are not certain whether they are reaching the Burnage families and children who are most in need.

Leadership and management are inadequate. Staffing shortages in the Manchester South district have placed a burden on the leadership of the centre. Consequently, leaders and managers spend too much of their time covering for absent staff. Safeguarding is inadequate. User group leaders do not have a full understanding of the centre's safeguarding policy. This omission leads to weaker support for vulnerable families using the centre. Leaders and managers, although aware of the increasingly diverse nature of the local population, are not directing available resources to promote equality of opportunity. Community cohesion is inadequate, because the centre does not know who lives in the locality and consequently does not ensure its provision meets local need. The governance and accountability of the centre are inadequate. It does not adequately reflect users' views. Supervision of centre staff by strategic leaders within the council lacks rigour. Performance management and/or appraisals are not regular enough or conducted with sufficient rigour. This has resulted in a lack of drive and determination to improve outcomes for children and families in the reach area.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure that all aspects of the core offer are provided or effectively sign-posted
- Improve the quality of safeguarding by ensuring that:
 - all leaders and managers, including volunteers, fully understand and implement the centre's policy
 - all users of the centre sign-in routinely

- managers and user groups register all new users.
- Identify local needs and engage with groups in the community who do not currently access the centre's activities, particularly those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable.
- Improve the quality of provision by:
 - using relevant data from health, education and other service providers to evaluate need and target provision
 - keeping accurate records of all users of the centre and taking regular and systematic account of their views
 - ensuring partner service providers focus on designing provision appropriate to need.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - at local authority level, strategic partners share the information necessary to protect the most vulnerable families and children within the reach area
 - the links between strategic area management meetings and the leadership/advisory board of the centre are strengthened
 - governance includes and reflects user views
 - all leaders and managers understand fully their responsibilities
 - accurate records of all meetings, which include action points and matters arising, are kept systematically
 - performance management and supervisory tasks are carried out regularly and include milestones and checks against targets
 - development planning uses all the information available to set realistic, measurable targets for improving outcomes for children, young people and families in the reach area.

How good are outcomes for users?

4

Children attending the nursery and pre-school eat healthy lunches and snacks. The outdoor facilities are good and children are encouraged to be active in their play. Activities for parents, such as Yummy Mummies, are contributing well to adults' understanding of healthy eating. However, not all user groups focus on eating healthily; some provide cakes on a regular basis. On site antenatal care enables parents to learn about how to keep healthy during pregnancy. However, the centre is not strategically using this partnership with health to target the most potentially vulnerable parents, such as teenage mothers, for additional support. Leaders do not seek information to evaluate whether their services are having any impact on outcomes in the reach area for key aspects such as breast feeding, obesity, smoking cessation, teenage pregnancy and sexual health.

Activities such as baby massage are popular. Parents interviewed by inspectors travel to this from in and around Manchester because it has a good reputation. Parents from this group appreciate the benefits of the well-resourced multi-sensory room.

The centre reports that the 'child alive' and first aid courses are popular. However, the centre does not know who has attended these courses and consequently does not evaluate their impact. Vulnerable adult users are not learning how to keep safe from harm because leaders and managers do not provide the guidance and support needed. In particular, they do not sign-post users to seek help and advice from appropriate professionals.

Partnership work by the 'Child and parents survival' group is ensuring the emotional well-being of families is a high priority. The local schools support this service well and parents spoken to during the inspection explained how it was helping them to change their perception of their children's behaviour. The centre links to a Manchester-wide service to protect the most vulnerable. However, reports to the centre leader from headteachers within the reach area highlight that there are still some children entering school who have not had any form of intervention or support, despite experiencing severe disadvantage. This demonstrates that there are children slipping through the support network.

Ofsted reports from local primary schools show that children are starting school with levels of skills and abilities which are below, or well below, national expectations. Local authority data show the percentage of five-year-olds achieving the early learning goals in the reach area is well below average and declining. Inspectors observed that children and families who use the centre regularly enjoy the activities and are learning new skills. However, as the centre does not evaluate the activities routinely, leaders and managers are not clear about the extent to which their services are making a difference to the day to day lives of its users. A parent forum exists, but is not active and has not had an influence on shaping services for over a year.

Very few, if any, adult users follow routes to gaining qualification and/or employment. The centre does not effectively support adults to access learning opportunities and is only able to share a very limited number of success stories. Even for users regularly attending a course, adults are not encouraged to pursue qualifications and the centre has little information available on routes to accreditation. Links with Jobcentre Plus are minimal. Few, if any users are provided with careers advice or helped to find routes into employment. The centre does not know whether teenage mothers return to education or employment because it does not target this vulnerable group within its reach.

These are the grades for outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable 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	4
The extent to which all users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	3
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	4

How good is the provision?

4

The centre does not take the lead in assessing the needs of children and families. Leaders and managers do not understand the e-start data provided by health and consequently do not use it to design provision. Health visitors take responsibility for determining the level of need and their judgements lead to referrals to the early intervention service. However, the centre reports that low staffing levels are affecting the quality of this service.

The centre relies on health workers to pass on information to the early intervention service regarding children, young people and families in need. Links between the outreach worker and health professionals are weak. This is partly because the outreach worker is a relatively new appointment and long term absence has restricted the extent to which the centre engages with users. In addition, the outreach role involves some time wasting activities, such as sitting in the Town Hall to encourage parents to register with Sure Start at the same time as registering their children's birth. This is an attempt to compensate for the lack of live birth data from the Primary Care Trust. The disjointed work between health and the centre mean that professionals are not sure whether they identify all the children and families within the reach. In addition, the centre does not know who is tackling vital aspects to improve the communities' health and well-being, such as reducing teenage pregnancy and improving sexual health.

The recent appointment of a qualified teacher has led to some purposeful learning for parents, children and staff in the centre and the local linked pre-school settings. She is developing some good quality play for children and has set up a 'rhyme and sign' group in response to a parental request. Health workers, such as the community nursery nurse, the behaviour psychologist and speech and language therapists all provide a valuable service to children and families. In addition, lone parents appreciate the one to one support provided by the counselling group, Gingerbread. However, there is no tracking of the users of these services by the centre. Some user groups that approach the centre are encouraged to use its facilities. For example, Bamboo is a new group which aims to support the parents of children with special educational needs. However, leaders and managers do not guide and support new user groups closely enough in following the centre's care procedures. Consequently, the centre's safeguarding procedures are not robust.

The centre does not support all suggestions from the community. For example, it could not provide a course for parents wanting to learn English as an additional language despite willingness from the adult education service to lead this provision.

Parents reported to inspectors that too few activities in the centre take place in the holidays. There are few opportunities for working parents because the centre closes at 5.30pm. Too many activities have stopped in the past year. For example, activities to support fathers, such as 'dads, dudes and kids' have ceased and not been replaced. Consequently, the range of activities offered by the centre is limited. Leaders and managers are not using the information from users and partners effectively to target specific need.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	4
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	3
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	4
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	4

How effective are the leadership and management?

4

Leaders and managers demonstrate a lack of ambition and resourcefulness to improve outcomes for families and children in the reach area. Local authority supervision is weak and key drivers for improvement, such as the performance management of staff, are not rigorous or robust. Staff absence, temporary posts and changing roles at local authority and centre level have added to the lack of drive and determination to deliver the core offer effectively. Strategic partnerships between health and Sure Start are not supporting the work of the centre well.

The centre does not track or evaluate the level of local need and the effectiveness of their partners in combating disadvantage. For example, it does not know whether teenage mothers have any access to taking qualifications or gain routes into employment. Although the centre is aware of the diverse nature of its reach area, it does not take this into account in securing new provision. Consequently, the promotion of equality and diversity is inadequate. Development planning is weak and does not make use of realistic targets to drive improvement. Leaders and managers do not make links between discussions at area management meetings and the work of the leadership/advisory group at the centre. No formal record of agreed actions from these meetings exists, so managers at all levels frequently miss opportunities to improve services.

The safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults using the centre is inadequate. Methods for recording attendance lack rigour. Although safeguarding policies are in place, not all leaders understand or follow the centre's procedures. Consequently, vulnerable families remain without necessary support.

Data demonstrate that only a very small proportion of families within the centre's reach access the limited range of activities provided by the centre. This compares unfavourably with other centres in the district. However, the families who do use the centre enjoy the activities. The partnerships between the Child and Adolescent Mental Health service and the Children and Parents Survival group are having a positive impact on outcomes. In addition, the day care and pre-school are providing a good service. The recent appointment of a qualified teacher is strengthening the outcomes for children who attend pre-school provision in the locality. The centre provides a limited number of places for children identified as 'in need' in support of the Manchester wide child protection policy. However, parents told inspectors that although they live within the centre's reach area, they are not able to secure a place for their children in the centre's day care provision because it is full.

The centre contributes to a Sure Start newsletter delivered to every household in the reach area. Leaders and managers feel this is beginning to alert potential users to the services available. However, the centre has only recently begun to make a note of enquiries from visitors so is unable to gauge the impact. Voluntary work is encouraged, but few volunteers go on to gain qualifications or employment. Parents and users of the centre do not have a clear pathway for ensuring they influence the centre's work.

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	4
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	4
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	4
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	4
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	4
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	4
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	3
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages the wider community to engage with services and uses their views to develop the range of provision	4

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

The outcomes for children who attend the day care and pre-school housed within Burnage Children's Centre were not inspected. However, information about outcomes was taken from recent Ofsted inspections of the providers.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Burnage Children's Centre on 9 and 10 June 2010. We judged the centre as inadequate overall.

Although the centre provides some enjoyable activities for children and families, it is not meeting the needs of the most vulnerable families and children who live nearby. This should be its core purpose. Leaders and managers do not ensure that the activities offered by the centre are helping to improve the outcomes for families and young people. Partnership work with multi-agency teams is providing a satisfactory service for some families and young people. But not all partners, leaders and managers are clear where the responsibility for monitoring this work lies. This places some of the most potentially vulnerable members of the local community at risk.

Children and families who use the facilities regularly enjoy the activities and are learning to keep fit and healthy. Volunteers are keen to provide a good service. Activities such as 'Yummy Mummies' are popular and those who attend are learning new skills and contributing well to the centre. The day care and pre-school facilities are good. However, local people told inspectors that they are not able to get a place for their children because it is full. The centre does not target some locally identified needs, such as improving sexual health and reducing the rate of teenage pregnancies. It does not know what provision is available for the teenage mothers in the reach area.

The community surrounding Burnage is changing. Levels of social and economic disadvantage are high. More families from minority ethnic groups are moving in. However, the children's centre does not target any support directly for these families. It does not promote equality of opportunity or celebrate diversity. The centre encourages volunteers to help at the centre. But it does not provide pathways to gain qualifications leading towards securing future employment and economic well-being.

The leadership and management of the centre are inadequate. Leaders and managers do not plan or set targets well for the future of the centre. They rely too heavily on the work of partners to meet local needs and do not take responsibility for

outcomes. The local authority does not check regularly enough on the centre's effectiveness. Formal records of management meetings are poor, so are unhelpful in improving the provision. As a consequence, supervisors do not know if the centre takes note of user views. The centre does not safeguard the health and well-being of all its users. Leaders and managers do not carry out the centre's policy for safeguarding and therefore vulnerable families remain in need of support.

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