

Inspection report for Fawood Children's Centre

Local authority	London Borough of Brent
Inspection number	366385
Inspection dates	26–27 January 2011
Reporting inspector	Jane Wotherspoon HMI

Centre governance	The governing body of Fawood Children's Centre on behalf of London Borough of Brent
Centre leader	Mark Cole
Date of previous inspection	N/A
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Linked school if applicable	Fawood Children's Centre
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	

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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 of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an early years inspector. The inspectors held meetings with the centre's staff, a representative from the local authority, members of the governing body, members of the parents' forum, and representatives from some of the centre's partners. They had informal discussions with parents and users of the services. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of documentation including case studies, a range of key policies, the centre's self-evaluation documents and its development plan, and data about the people who use the centre.

Information about the centre

Fawood Children's Centre in Harlesden is integrated within a maintained nursery school of the same name which was designated as a Sure Start Children's Centre in March 2005. It was set up as part of a regeneration programme and partly funded by the local housing trust. The demolition of the high rise blocks surrounding the centre is almost complete and building work to replace them continues.

The school has a unit providing up to 20 part-time places for children with autism. In addition, Brent's outreach autism team of specialist staff, who provide advice, training and support for schools and families across the local authority, is based at the centre. The centre also provides 21 part-time places for two-year-old children in receipt of the nursery grant. The provision of 12 day care places has been phased out over time as demand has fallen. Many children start in the Nursery with skills and experiences that are below expectations for their age.

The head of centre is also the headteacher of the school. Both the manager of the extended services and the family support worker have been in post for less than a year. A number of health and family support services operate regularly from the centre, although none is based there permanently. The governing body of the nursery school holds the centre accountable for its effectiveness. In particular, the parent and community committee, which includes parents and service partners, advises on services.

The centre’s designated ‘reach’ area has changed twice and is likely to change again in the near future. The centre serves an area of high social deprivation and wide ethnic and cultural diversity. The main groups are Black Caribbean (21%) and Somali (13%). Approximately 40% of the families registered with the centre are from workless households. Mobility is high.

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

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

2

Main findings

The centre’s good range of services makes a positive difference to the many children and families who use them. The centre has effective systems for assessing the needs of the children and families, and endeavours to meet these through a mix of universal and targeted programmes of support. Outcomes are consistently good as a result, with significant strengths in the way that parents and carers feel empowered to make decisions about their lives. Users of the centre appreciate the warm welcome they receive from staff and providers of the activities. They feel safe and comfortable approaching centre staff for advice. Attendance at activities is good and participants reflect the wide ethnic and cultural mix of the community.

Good leadership and management, with a particularly strong lead from the head of centre, underpin a vision of excellence. Despite a lack of direction and challenge from the local authority, there is clear governance and accountability at centre level. Accountability at local authority level is becoming clearer and the centre’s leaders and governors are actively seeking greater clarity about the authority’s expectations through new service level agreements. The absence of accurate data from the local authority about the reach area and about the centre’s contribution to improving outcomes at a local level has made it difficult for the centre to make long-term strategic decisions. Nonetheless, the centre has established systems to track year-on-year data to show the impact of its work in, for example, improving outcomes for children in the nursery. The centre gathers a range of information on who uses the extended services but does not always analyse the data closely to follow up, for example, why there might be variations in attendance at drop-in sessions or to follow through the impact of training in the longer term.

The centre uses what it knows about the community it serves to set clear priorities and challenging targets for future development. Importantly, all partners providing a service from the centre are involved in identifying how their services contribute to the centre's aims. Partners are fully engaged in the process of self-evaluation and share high aspirations for helping the centre to become outstanding in the future. The centre is proactive in trying to find alternative providers to maintain a balance of services to meet the core offer of a phase one centre. For example, Jobcentre Plus does not provide a service from the centre, so the centre has commissioned alternative providers to help users with advice on seeking employment.

Partnerships are outstanding on a number of levels. Partnership working in the centre and the day-to-day sharing of information and informal communication ensures that support can be targeted appropriately for families. More formal meetings between a number of partners and services operating from the centre are held regularly to ensure a very effective multi-agency approach to working on behalf of children and families who need specific support. The centre can cite some striking examples of how coordinated working between agencies, such as the early intervention team, social services and health services, working with centre staff, has changed the lives of some of its most vulnerable users.

A particular strength is the way in which parents, carers and other users are involved systematically in evaluating the services they use. Through the well-established parents' forum, parents and users make a strong contribution to decisions about the centre. In identifying what works well and what could be improved further, users are helping to shape the services that are provided. The centre's staff listen carefully to what users have to say to modify programmes and, in particular, to repeat some programmes and courses at different times to encourage different users. 'Strengthening families, strengthening communities' is being run on a Saturday morning, for example, to target male carers. Nonetheless, the centre's leaders know that there are families that are not yet registered with the centre that might benefit from its services. Staff have dropped leaflets in nearby streets to encourage families to use the centre but with modest success.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- The local authority should provide clear targets and expectations for the centre, and support future development with accurate and helpful data that enable the centre to strengthen its strategic planning.
- Strengthen efforts to reach out to parents, carers and members of the community who are not yet engaging with the centre's services.
- Analyse better some of the information the centre holds about who uses its services and to measure the impact of the services on long-term outcomes.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Parents are engaging well with activities around healthy living and learning how to provide healthy and affordable meals for their families at the very popular 'cook and eat' sessions run by two nutritionists. Such sessions encourage children to explore textures and tastes of different healthy foods. Parents say that older children are trying the recipes at home. The nutritionists also run weight management courses locally and train nursery staff to identify potential weight problems in children which can be referred. Mothers are getting good support for weaning and breastfeeding at the baby massage sessions which also help parents engage with their children to support their emotional well-being.

Children get lots of fresh air and exercise at the centre, and the nature of the physical environment enables them to learn about risks in a safe environment. They are secure and happy with a sense of belonging and well-being. The fact that users feel safe and confident at the centre is exemplified by attendance at courses. For example, fathers are comfortable attending the baby massage class and pop in and play sessions. Users say that staff are accessible and supportive so they feel comfortable to share concerns and issues. Users attending first aid and home safety courses have been helped to identify potential risks and the centre has provided equipment to help their homes be safer for the family.

Observations of the children's learning show that they make good progress. Many children start nursery with lower than expected skills and experiences. In particular, children's language skills are not well developed. Staff collate information regularly to identify children who need more support to help them catch up. Staff have noticed that starting points are higher where children have joined the nursery at the age of two. Home visits when children start nursery set the right tone for encouraging parents to get involved in their children's learning. The popular 'pop in and play' sessions help parents to understand and recognise what their children are learning and to support their learning through playing with them in the same way at home.

Most children behave very well and those that have difficulty have an appropriate plan to support improvements in their behaviour. Children are gaining independence in choosing for themselves, and take responsibility for themselves and for resources. Children from the unit take part in a range of modified activities to meet their needs and mix well with the other children. Parenting programmes such as 'strengthening families, strengthening communities' have been effective in helping parents 'learn about myself'. As well as giving parents the strategies to manage their children's behaviour at home, the course has given some parents the impetus to change their lives. As one said in her evaluation of the course: 'I have learned a lot about how to be friendly and how to greet people. I know what choices to make if my child does something. I now want to work hard and learn in college and hopefully get a job because I want to earn my pay, not just depend on benefits all the time. I am very grateful for this course.'

The systematic approach to gaining users' views through the parents' forum empowers parents to raise issues and make decisions. Parents are full of praise for

the centre which has done so much for them. Parent 'champions' drop off leaflets in the community and encourage others they meet to attend sessions in the centre.

The centre's flexible approach to providing nursery places or crèche facilities enables parents to undertake training to improve their own education. Parents and carers attending courses to improve their English skills have gained much success. Approximately two thirds of those participating in the termly courses have gone on to further study or have found employment. The picture is similar for those taking courses in child care. Good access to information and support through the Citizens Advice Bureau regarding benefits and tax credits is providing families with improved financial stability. Parents have requested training in basic computer skills which the centre is planning to provide through a parent volunteer who 'wants to give something back to the centre'.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	2
The extent to which all users 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 users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre's thorough systems for assessing the needs of children, parents and other users ensure that the centre is in a good position to provide tailored programmes of support. Regular meetings of the locality forum bring together representatives of social services, the early intervention team, local schools and children's centres to discuss and promote the range of services available in the locality. Referrals to Fawood's services come from a variety of sources including self-referral. The family support worker completes an assessment and sets up a personal package of support according to need. This may include a mix of targeted one-to-one support such as counselling, information and guidance for the parent, attendance at one or more of the general sessions for the parents and children, and/or the provision of a nursery place or crèche facilities. Parents feel exceptionally well supported on an individual level, especially in times of crises. The cases of children and families assessed under the Common Assessment Framework are reviewed regularly by the range of professionals working with the family to ensure that progress is being made and that the support remains appropriate as needs change. The autism team assesses the

needs of children and families across the local authority as well as providing outreach work and effective targeted support for children in the centre's unit.

The range of activities available for children in the nursery enables them to develop skills and knowledge across all areas of learning. Modifications to the activities ensure that children with additional needs, including those from the autistic unit, can make good use of the nursery's facilities. The good variety of universal and targeted activities provided directly by centre staff and those from commissioned services offer users choice in working with their children and/or improving their own knowledge as a platform for further study or employment. Parents are highly satisfied with the available services and many return frequently. Participation rates are good and some sessions are very popular. However, seasonal changes in participation rates are not always followed up and analysed to ensure that sessions are continuing to meet the needs of users. For example, attendance at 'pop in and play' fell during the winter quarter. Staff suspect this is related to weather conditions but have not followed up these figures to establish the cause.

The centre also provides some courses that are targeted to provide support for particular groups. For example, a six-week course run by the family support worker has helped teenage parents with parenting skills; a course for Somali asylum seekers has introduced them to the English education system; and the successful 'strengthening families' course is being run on Saturday mornings for fathers and male carers who cannot always attend sessions during the day.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users	2
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users	2
The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community	2

How effective are the leadership and management?

2

The governing body provides effective support and challenge for the centre through its well-established committee structure. The parent and community committee acts as the conduit between the parents' forum, which includes other users, and the full governing body. This ensures that users are able to shape services, to contribute to the centre's evaluation process and to influence decisions. Accountability is clear through well-embedded systems for managing performance and professional supervision. Day-to-day management is smooth. All staff know where their work fits into the bigger picture of the centre's provision because their performance targets feed into the centre's development plan. Morale is high and all staff are strongly committed to their work and to the success of the centre. The centre leader provides

a positive role model both in the centre and in the wider community. The roles of the extended services manager and family support worker are developing well and both recognise the need to analyse further the information they gather to strengthen evaluation of the impact of services.

The centre’s development plan sets appropriate priorities, tasks and resources based on an honest evaluation of what works well and what needs to improve. It sets sharp success criteria based on improving outcomes for users and takes account of the changing needs of the locality within the context of reorganisation in the local authority and changes to funding. The lack of availability of data and absence of clear expectations from the local authority has not stood in the way of the centre in planning to meet the needs of the community as far as it can. Centre leaders acknowledge the need to reach out to a wider range of users in the locality who would benefit from services.

Relationships in the centre are harmonious. Parents feel very well supported. Different religious beliefs and cultural needs are recognised and valued by centre staff which supports a good level of engagement from people of different faith and cultural backgrounds in the community. Resources, including staff, and activities reflect the diversity in the community. All are treated with respect in the centre. User-friendly leaflets and alternative means of communication, including the use of translators, ensure that language differences are not a barrier to participation. Children with additional needs are integrated into the nursery.

Parents, carers, users and providers of services are clear about their role in safeguarding children. The centre’s policies are robust and users understand this priority. Staff have received appropriate levels of training for their roles. Systems for making referrals are very clear, well understood and followed appropriately. Risk assessments are regular and procedures for vetting adults are secure. Users understand safety measures and all have been alert to health and safety issues during extensive building works outside the centre.

The vision for the centre’s development is shared across the services that use the centre. Service providers are clear about their role within the centre because they are involved in setting the centre’s priorities, shaping the centre’s services, and in evaluating the impact of their work. The centre makes effective and flexible use of the skills of staff and service partners to avoid duplication of effort. Partners feel that their work is valued by the centre’s leaders as well as by the families they serve. Exceptionally strong partnerships at all levels ensure close and effective working between centre staff and other professionals to secure good quality support for children and families that leads to good outcomes. The centre provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<p>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</p>	<p>2</p>
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The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	2
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community	2
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	2
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	2
The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities	2
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide	1
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	2

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

Not applicable

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Summary for centre users

We inspected Fawood Children's Centre on 26 and 27 January 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

During the inspection, we held meetings with some of the centre's staff and many of the people who come to the centre to help you. We were pleased to be able to speak to some of you to find out what you think of the centre and the services it provides. I would like to say a particular 'thank you' to those of you who came specially to meet us. We took your views into account when we made our judgements.

Some of you told us that the centre makes a big difference to your lives. We judged that the centre has good systems for finding out how services can help you and your

children. Many of the sessions that are open to everyone are helping you to learn about keeping your families healthy and safe. You told us that you enjoy learning with your children at 'pop in and play' sessions. Many of you spoke positively about the sessions that help you to manage your children's behaviour. The centre sometimes helps you by offering places for your children in the nursery or at the crèche so that you can attend training to improve your skills. It was especially pleasing to hear that many of you who attended courses to improve your English have been able to go on to further training or find a job.

The centre provides a good number of services for individual families. The family support worker is good at finding the right kind of help and support. She can get you an appointment with a counsellor or with the Citizens Advice Bureau, for example. Some families need help with housing and she can organise help with that, too. The centre's staff work very well with partners from health, social services and specialist services such as speech and language therapists to make sure that the help from different agencies is joined up and meets your needs.

A particular strength is the way that the centre's leaders find out your views of the services. The parents' forum is a really good way to make sure that your views are heard and that you can help to decide on the services that are developed in the future. The centre's staff listen carefully to what you have to say and activities are changed so that they meet your needs.

You told us that you get a warm welcome from the staff and the people leading the sessions you attend. You feel well supported and comfortable about sharing your problems and asking for help. The activities are usually full and it is good to see that people from all over the community use the centre. Some of you said that you are making new friends as well as learning about different cultures in the community. The centre has a map that shows the local area and where people using the centre live. Some gaps on the map show that the centre may be able to help even more people who live nearby. Staff have dropped leaflets there to encourage families to come to the centre and the parent champions also encourage new people to try the centre's activities. We have asked the centre to keep trying to encourage more people to use the services.

Many of you said that you think highly of the head of centre. He and the centre's staff, and all the partners providing a service at the centre, are working hard to make the centre the best it can be. In order to do that, the centre needs better information from Brent council about the people in the local area. The centre also needs Brent council to set clear expectations of what should be achieved. The centre's staff keep lots of information about who uses the different services but we think they could use this information better. For example, they could ask questions about why some sessions are more popular than others and find out what happens to you after you have finished your training.

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