

Inspection report for Gun Lane Children's Centre

Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	367805
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Jackie Krafft HMI

Centre governance	Governing body of All Faiths' Children's Community School
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Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	All Faiths' Children's Community School URN 118532
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Not applicable

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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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 one early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with the centre's leadership team, members of the advisory board, staff, and representatives from the local authority. They also spoke with partner agencies, including those from the health service, parents, carers and other users of the centre. They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Gun Lane Children's Centre serves a socially and economically mixed community. Most families are of White British heritage. Approximately one fifth of children in the area are from over 20 minority ethnic groups. Within the centre's reach area there are pockets of deprivation with high levels of unemployment and families living on low incomes or benefits. The number of families living in the area for a short time is high.

The centre is located in temporary accommodation on the site of All Faiths' Children's Community School. It was designated as a phase two centre in March 2008 and offers family learning, health and support services. It is open 51 weeks a year for 10 hours a day. Childcare in the area is provided by private and voluntary providers, day nurseries and childminders. The centre offers support to these providers and two other primary schools in its reach area. The most recent inspection of the co-located primary school identified that the knowledge, skills and understanding of children entering the nursery are well below those expected for their age.

The centre is managed by the governing body of All Faiths' Children's Community School and led by its senior leaders. The centre manager, who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the centre, is also the assistant headteacher of the school. Advice and assistance is provided by the advisory board which includes representatives from partner agencies.

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

Increasing numbers of families, including those who are hard to reach and the most vulnerable, are benefiting from the wide range of good quality services provided by Gun Lane Children’s Centre. As a result outcomes are improving and are good. Strong outreach and effective community liaison work underpins the centre’s successes. Well-qualified, skilful staff have a good understanding of the needs of the community and develop positive, trusting relationships with its families. As a result, parents and carers, including those who are new to the area, feel welcome, fully included and well supported. One parent summed up the views of many in saying, ‘Without them I don’t know where I would be.’ In this caring environment, users enjoy learning and playing with their children. Users say they grow in confidence, make new friends, feel less isolated and are better able to cope.

The centre has built strong partnerships with a wide range of agencies, in addition to health and social care, so provides well-integrated and cohesive services for its diverse groups of users, including families of children with hearing impairment. Users say that this makes a real difference to them. They value the easier access they have through the centre to a wide and varied range of information, guidance and support on issues such as housing, debt management, local schools and childcare.

Users say that they feel safe and well cared for at the centre and are increasingly aware of how to keep their children safe too. Robust safeguarding procedures and practices are given a high priority and implemented consistently by well-trained and vigilant staff. Good multi-agency working is making a strong contribution to successfully supporting families and children who are in need and most at risk of harm.

Equality is promoted effectively and diversity celebrated well. The views of users are gathered regularly and make a positive contribution to shaping the services offered. A varied and carefully planned programme of well-resourced and interesting activities is matched to the diverse needs of users. Good arrangements are made to ensure that all groups have the opportunity to participate; for example, by making some activities available during the early evening and school holidays for working parents,

fathers and those with older children.

The centre is well led and managed. There are clear lines of accountability and reporting arrangements. Effective joint planning and working practices between the school and centre is making a significant contribution to supporting the transition into education for children and their parents and carers. This is evident in the improved outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage for those children who have accessed the centre's services. Leaders understand the centre's strengths and where improvements can be made. There are outreach plans for individual users but the centre's strategic planning for improvement is not robust. Priorities are not yet sharply focused on improving outcomes, including over time. Planning lacks clear targets that have been informed by the full range of information and data available. It also lacks milestones to monitor progress and criteria against which to measure success. A good range of partners are represented on the advisory board. However, their role, particularly in providing challenge and advice, is not yet fully understood or developed by all members. The weaknesses in the centre's strategic planning processes compound this.

Nevertheless, good and improving outcomes, increased participation rates in universal and targeted services, high levels of user satisfaction as well as effective multi-agency working and outreach work all demonstrate that the centre understands its individual users' needs well and has good capacity for sustained improvement.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- Ensure planning for improvement is robust by:
 - using the full range of data and information available, including national and local benchmarks, to set ambitious targets
 - ensuring priorities are focused on improving outcomes for users
 - identifying clear milestones against which to monitor progress
 - specifying how success will be measured.

- The local authority and centre leaders to support the further development of the advisory board by:
 - ensuring all board members understand their support, advice and challenge role
 - providing them with a good range of information about the quality of provision and outcomes for users to inform their questioning and advice.

How good are outcomes for users?

2

Case studies, evaluations and discussions with users demonstrate that there is a high level of satisfaction with the centre's provision. Parents and carers who have felt isolated and experienced emotional difficulties or family crisis report that they have increased self-esteem and confidence as well as reduced levels of stress and anxiety. This has helped them to develop a more positive relationship with their children. One

parent whose child lacked confidence noted 'they have come on such a long way in two months'. Users say they enjoy spending time playing with their children, learning about their development and how to manage their behaviour successfully. Children in the centre play happily together, are inquisitive and develop their independence. They learn to share and communicate with each other and develop new skills.

New mothers who choose to breastfeed their babies say that they are well supported, which encourages them to persevere through any initial difficulties. They recognise that this helps them to bond more easily with their babies. Obesity levels in children under five in the area have reduced. Users who attended a 'Let's Cook' course are more confident and adventurous about cooking complete meals from fresh ingredients. Some have been motivated to invite friends from the course round to their homes for a meal and others have learnt how to cook international food from different members of the course. Users also gain an understanding that family meal times are important opportunities to talk and socialise with their children. Users demonstrate that they have a better understanding of oral hygiene and have changed their routines as a result, for example by giving less sugary drinks and switching from a bottle to a trainer cup. Data shows that children who have accessed the centre services have improved their physical development by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Users say that they and their children feel safe. Children learn safe habits, for example to sit while eating. They have a better understanding of how to identify danger and take the necessary precautions to keep themselves safe. This was evident when one child was using oven gloves when playing with pretend hot food. Users are increasingly familiar with a range of safety precautions both inside the home and beyond. For example, they have an increased understanding of road safety, fire hazards and the need to make hot drinks away from children. Hospital admissions for incidents of serious harm to children under five in the area have reduced. Users feel better equipped to take care of their children by learning first aid. Case studies show that good multi-agency working, joint home visits and a clear understanding of the Common Assessment Framework are helping to keep vulnerable children safe, including those at most risk of harm.

Users develop trusting relationships with staff and each other so are confident about sharing their views, talking about any concerns, making suggestions and contributing their ideas. A parent forum has recently been established to build on this positive contribution further. Users develop a range of additional skills that will support their future economic well-being, including computer skills and how to manage their finances more effectively. One user also enjoyed completing a wallpaper hanging course. Although there are currently no opportunities for volunteering at the centre, users readily support others. For example, they suggested and organised a charity fund raising event, a 'bring and buy rail' and a centre users' allotment. These demonstrate their increasing enterprise skills and contribute to improving the economic well-being of some families. Others have benefited from donations by users of a range of equipment such as stair gates and buggies.

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	2
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

2

The centre has a good understanding of the communities that it serves. This is supported by a developing range of information and analyses that is regularly provided by the local authority. Well-targeted outreach work, including joint home visits with other professionals, is effectively increasing the engagement of hard to reach families in the most deprived areas. Good partnership working and information sharing between frontline workers from key agencies support the early assessment of individual users' needs well. Consequently, families who need it, particularly those at risk of harm and those experiencing difficulties, are provided with a cohesive package of support that is tailored to their specific needs. This makes a significant contribution to keeping them safe and improving their emotional well-being.

There is a good range of well-planned, practical activities, including taster sessions, to engage users from the wider community and promote fun family learning. Stay and Play, Bump to Baby, Little Chefs and Let's Cook, which is run by members of the Women's Institute, are well attended and popular activities because they meet the needs of a wide range of users well. Activities for families with specific needs are coordinated with specialist services. For example, Sip and Sign for families with deaf or hearing impaired children is supported by a specialist teacher and links with a specialist clinic. One parent noted, 'This saves a separate trip to the hospital for us.' Parents and carers particularly value the way that staff get to know their individual children well and then offer activities that they will particularly enjoy such as messy play activities and reading together. Enrolment on adult learning courses locally has increased but the centre acknowledges that partnerships with adult learning providers, Jobcentre Plus and the contribution this is making to users' future employability are still developing.

Users feel well supported and are confident that staff will respond to their needs promptly and sensitively. For example, they have been accompanied to meetings with housing services, helped with completing forms and supported in accessing

specialist equipment. There is a wide range of easily accessible information available at the centre, and users are signposted to varied and relevant services, including other children’s centres and childcare providers. Attractive displays, posters and interesting newsletters are readily accessible in the centre as well as at local venues and events such as the library, shops and market. They promote the centre, offer tips and advice and engage the wider community well.

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 centre’s leaders make good use of the limited space available to create a warm, attractive environment where all groups of users feel happy, safe and well supported. Resources are of high quality, celebrate diversity, breakdown stereotypes and engage all groups of users well. The webcam currently following the development of chicks in a nearby nest is generating particular interest. Strong relationships with users, key partners, other agencies and the wider community are contributing to improving outcomes for children and families. Consequently, the centre provides good value for money.

Equality and diversity are promoted well so that centre users reflect the cultural, ethnic and social diversity in the community. Families, including those who are new to the area, those who speak English as an additional language and those who have children with disabilities such as hearing impairment, are provided with the relevant specialist support, advice and resources. Consequently, they are fully included in activities and have equal access to the full range of services available.

Thorough attention is paid to ensuring users and staff are safeguarded well. All appropriate checks and extensive risk assessments are carried out thoroughly and recorded carefully. Well-trained staff work in close partnership with other agencies to provide early interventions and support for the most vulnerable, including children and families at risk of harm.

Links with the primary school are intrinsic in the leadership, management and governance arrangements of the centre. This provides good continuity of provision and support for families. Lines of accountability and reporting arrangements between the centre, school and local authority are clear and understood. However, centre leaders and the local authority recognise that the role of the advisory board is not yet

fully understood by all its members, particularly how they use the range of relevant information available to inform their questioning and advice. The local authority has introduced a system to collect information and provide the centre with an analysis of local data which is being developed further. The centre routinely collects and analyses information about activities and individual users. Outreach support plans are in place for those who are most vulnerable. However, the centre's strategic plan for improvement is not robust. This is because it does not build on the full range of information available to identify specific targets or clear success measures to drive improvement and inform future planning.

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	2
The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community	3
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	2
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

None

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Gun Lane Children's Centre on 18 and 19 May 2011. We judged the centre as good overall.

More families in the area are using the centre and taking advantage of the good range of services and activities that it has to offer, including family fun activities run in the school holidays. Those of you we spoke to told us how much you enjoy being at the centre because you meet other families and make new friends. This has been particularly helpful for those of you who are new to the area. You really value the friendly welcome that you are given by all the staff. You are confident that they give you lots of good advice and support. If they cannot offer you what you need themselves then they know who can. They point you in the right direction about a whole range of things such as housing, managing your finances and childcare.

Staff do everything they can to help those of you who might find it difficult to come to the centre. This might include providing you with support and advice in your own homes. Some of you told us that this has really helped you to gain more confidence so you now attend some of the activities at the centre too. Staff have also helped you to complete forms and accompanied you to meetings with other organisations if you have needed it. This has been especially helpful at times when some of you have been experiencing a lot of difficulties.

You told us how the centre is making a real difference to your lives. Those of you who have moved into the area or have recently had a baby explained that the centre has made you feel less isolated, anxious and worried about the changes in your lives. You told us that you have been better able to cope, for example with managing your child's behaviour, sleeping and eating habits.

You enjoy learning and playing with your children and the centre offers a good variety of activities. These are advertised well at the centre and other places locally such as the library, market and shops. The centre's toys, books and other equipment are good. It was really interesting to see the chicks developing in the nest through the webcam. The Let's Cook course has been extremely popular and given you lots of good ideas. You are using these ideas to cook meals from scratch using all fresh ingredients. Some of you have even cooked meals for other members of the course, friends and family. You appreciate that the staff get to know your children very well. You told us that they provide activities that your children really enjoy. The centre regularly asks for your views about what it offers and how it could improve. You are happy to make suggestions because you know that they will be taken seriously. For example, it was your idea to have an allotment, a 'bring and buy' rail and hold charity fund-raising events.

Keeping you and your children safe is taken very seriously by the centre. All the correct checks have been carried out by the centre's leaders to keep you safe. Staff are well trained, and work together as a team to keep everyone free from harm. You told us that you feel safe and are confident that your children are well cared for at the centre. You have learnt a lot about how to keep your children safe at home and

when out with them, for example by learning about fire risks, dangers to avoid when cooking and road safety. The first-aid course was something you asked for that has helped too.

The centre runs very smoothly because it is well led and managed by the leaders of All Faiths' School. These links with the school are helpful, particularly as your children get older and start their education. Everyone at the centre works well together as a team and is determined to provide you with the services that you need. Leaders regularly check what your different needs are and what the centre is doing to help you. As well as what you tell them, they get lots of other information to help them improve the services even more. They have a plan to help them to do this but it is not yet as detailed as it should be. We have asked the leaders to remedy this. There is also an advisory board of people who work with the centre leaders to help them improve services but they are still learning how to do this. We have asked the centre leaders and local authority to help the advisory board learn more.

Thank you for contributing to the inspection by talking to us and sharing your views.

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