

# Inspection report for Brooklands Children's Centre

Local authority	Manchester
Inspection number	367764
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Linda McLarty HMI

Centre governance	The local authority
Centre leader	Mrs Lynne Mills
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Linked school if applicable	Not applicable
Linked early years and childcare, if applicable	Holyrood Nursery EY375831

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.

## Introduction

The inspection addressed 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 leadership and management, with local authority representatives, partnership and advisory board representatives, parents, carers and centre users. They observed the centre's work and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

## Information about the centre

Brooklands Sure Start Children's Centre is a phase one children's centre which was designated in 2008 and provides all elements of the full core offer. Parental outreach work, family support and early intervention are provided by Barnados. Partner services which are provided in the centre include adult learning classes and health services such as antenatal book-ins, breastfeeding support and new-baby groups. The Citizens Advice Bureau and Psychological Wellbeing Service hold weekly sessions in the centre. Governance is by the local authority and there is a partnership advisory board in place.

Of the 1,028 children under age five in the catchment area, 174 live in the centre's two super output areas, which are classed as being in the 70% most disadvantaged areas nationally. Of these children, 108 (62%) are registered with Brooklands Children's Centre. There are 854 children living in the six super output areas which are classed as being among the 30% most deprived areas in the country. Of these children, 533 (62.4%) are registered with the children's centre.

The centre has 641 children registered overall, representing approximately 62% of the total number in the predominantly White British population of Brooklands. The growing immigrant population includes many Eastern European families. The centre currently has approximately 140 children from non-White British backgrounds on the registration, which equates to approximately 21% of children registered overall.

The centre serves an area with 5.7% unemployment, and 32% of children aged under four-years-old are living in households dependent upon workless benefits, compared to 15.3% nationally.

The on-site Holyrood Nursery offers care and education for up to 56 children from birth to 5 years. An inspection of this provision was carried out in December 2009 and the nursery was judged as good overall. The report is available on the Ofsted website at <http://www.Ofsted.gov.uk>

The centre also supports children in two other private sector settings in its reach area, Rupert's Private Day Nursery and Happy Days Private Day Nursery. The centre has close links with the adjacent primary school, Sandilands. Children in the reach area enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and understanding well below those seen nationally.

## 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**

**3**

### Capacity for sustained improvement

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

**3**

## Main findings

Brooklands Children's Centre is improving the five Every Child Matters outcomes for the families in its reach area satisfactorily, despite recent cuts to partner and commissioned services, which for example have reduced the outreach work. The staff team remain optimistic and proactive in the face of shrinking resources and the imminent loss of key posts such as that of the children's centre teacher. Users describe all four members of the staff team as consistently caring, welcoming and kind, regularly 'going beyond the call of duty' to help them.

The centre helps users to stay safe and enjoy and achieve well in their learning and development. The head of centre is acknowledged in the local authority as an asset for her experience and knowledge of the wider safeguarding agenda. All of the staff are trained in safeguarding and committed to providing a safe environment and to help local residents stay safe. Effective cross-sector planning for children's learning and development is helping children make good progress from very low starting

points.

Provision is satisfactory overall, and learning and development is good. However, the centre does not yet track the progression of adults into training, further or higher education, or into employment. The range of activities and services, although satisfactory, is more limited now than in previous years, and is not always sufficiently targeted upon the needs of all of the groups in the area.

The centre's leadership and management receive good support from the local authority, and performance management is aligned to the improvement targets in the district development plan. The head of centre is the chair of the advisory board. This compromises the advisory board's ability to challenge and hold the centre to account. The authority and the centre leadership are aware of this but in a climate of rapid change have allowed this situation to continue, in order to minimise disruption, as the authority is undergoing a full service review.

The leadership, and many of the partner organisations, are at an early stage of evaluating their work in terms of identifying the centre's measurable impact on outcomes. Impact data is not consistently shared between partners and the children's centre. This limits the leadership's ability to evaluate the effectiveness of its own and of its commissioned provision, or accurately tailor its services to the needs of individuals or groups. Nevertheless, the information the centre currently gathers or receives is organised well, analysed satisfactorily and used to reshape services.

Although ambitious to improve the life chances of residents in the reach area, the leadership's target setting lacks precision and the development plan does not describe measurable success criteria. This makes it difficult for the leadership, advisory board and local authority to evaluate the success of the improvement activity.

The needs of some key vulnerable groups are not systematically taken into account when planning or monitoring the impact of services, although the staff's local knowledge is used well to supplement information from social care colleagues. Consequently, the promotion of equality and diversity is no more than satisfactory.

The effectiveness of partnership working is variable. Some strong relationships are in place, particularly between the centre, partners from education and the Early Intervention Team. However, the information exchange between some partners is insufficiently based upon tracking the impact of the centre's own and its commissioned work and using this information to drive further improvement.

User views are solicited following activities, and although the feedback shows high levels of satisfaction, attendance is often variable and there are too few users who are meaningfully involved in decision making.

Taking into account the satisfactory outcomes, provision, and leadership and

management, the centre's overall effectiveness is also satisfactory. The centre's capacity for continued improvement is satisfactory. The leadership are aware that future or sustained improvement is limited by current and imminent cuts and changes to services, and by the accuracy of evaluation and target setting.

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

### Recommendations for further improvement

- Work with the local authority and partner agencies such as health and social care to:
  - improve the systems to gather and evaluate evidence of the impact of the centre's work
  - improve the precision of target setting, and include measurable success criteria, to enable the leadership and management, local authority and advisory board to evaluate the centre's progress towards the targets
  - increase the extent to which the advisory board can offer impartial challenge and hold the centre to account by ensuring the objectivity of the chair.
  
- Improve the arrangements to:
  - assess the needs of and plan for and monitor the outcomes of key target groups, particularly those who may be subject to discrimination
  - increase the participation of parents, carers and centre users in the decision-making process.
  
- Improve the extent to which centre users develop economic stability and independence by monitoring and evaluating their progress into accredited training, higher education or future employment.

## How good are outcomes for users?

<b>3</b>
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There is compelling case study evidence of adults being supported towards better emotional and mental health through improved confidence and self-esteem, which helps them take charge of their lives. Other health outcomes are less secure. Data from 2010 indicate that 10% of children in Reception Year are obese compared to 9.6% nationally and 13% city wide, but other than this, the centre has limited reliable, current health data about its reach area. The Smoke Free Homes programme was successful in the wider Wythenshawe area; however, uptake of the smoking cessation programme was far less successful in Brooklands, and the leadership are analysing the reasons for this, in order to further support these initiatives.

The centre's rigorous and systematic risk assessment ensures a safe environment. Consultation with children in Holyrood Nursery demonstrates that they feel safe in the setting. Families are given home safety equipment and receive free fire safety

visits, advice, and equipment such as smoke alarms from the fire service. These initiatives enhance safety in the home. Although emergency hospital admissions at 19% are far higher than the national average of 4%, staff and partners attribute this to parents using the nearby Wythenshawe hospital as their first resort in the event of accidents, rather than taking children to their doctors. This conclusion is echoed by partners, and corroborated by the fact that the emergency admissions mirror those of Wythenshawe as a whole.

The centre leaders have identified that the information provided by some social care partners about children in need, children subject to child protection plans or children in care lacks the detail necessary to enable the centre to offer consistently swift support. Nevertheless, centre staff use their good local knowledge and data from the Early Intervention Team to focus support for these vulnerable children.

Centre users praised the emotionally safe environment created by the very welcoming staff: 'You can come in here just to relax, kick back, and know you can share your problems.' Parents gave moving examples, echoed in the case studies, of how programmes to help residents identify and deal with domestic abuse and violence have greatly improved their families' personal safety, including physical, mental, emotional and sexual safety.

The progress made by children in the Brooklands area has accelerated in recent years, from very low starting points. A school headteacher confirmed that children who use this centre's services are conspicuously 'school ready'. However, the 2010 Early Years Foundation Stage profile scores in reading, writing and emotional development indicate that achievement, whilst in line with Manchester averages, is still lower than that seen nationally. This is particularly for boys, who are significantly underachieving. To address this, the centre piloted a Forest School project for children in Holyrood Nursery, in order to adapt provision to the more active learning style of boys. Initial findings show improved engagement and independent learning, particularly for boys. The centre is focusing its cross-sector educational partnership on raising achievement in the deficit areas from the 2010 profile scores.

Children behave well and their views are taken into account when planning activities. The views of adults are sought in terms of their satisfaction with activities and courses, and questionnaires are used frequently. There is only one parent or carer on the advisory board and very few parents attend the newly-formed Parents' Forum. Parents spoken to during the inspection expressed a wish for formal involvement but were not aware of the existence of the forum as a platform for their views.

Despite children and adults enjoying and achieving well in both learning and development, there is insufficient evidence of the proportions of adults who progress into further education or into employment.

These are the grades for the outcomes for users

<b>The extent to which children, including those from vulnerable groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which all users enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and users contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents are developing economic stability and independence including access to training</b>	<b>3</b>

### **How good is the provision?**

<b>3</b>
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The leadership recently introduced a 'Service Assessment Planning Toolkit' to improve assessment arrangements, but it is too early to see the effect of this change. The centre and its outreach workers use pre-Common Assessment Framework procedures to identify individual and family needs and pre-empt higher level intervention. Only three children were subject to Common Assessment Procedures in the autumn of 2010. Despite some gaps in detailed information about the local area, centre staff have a sound overview of residents' needs and use the information to plan or reshape provision satisfactorily. For example, the leadership want to encourage more fathers to engage. However, the needs of all groups are not routinely considered when planning provision. Registration arrangements are not capturing the high percentage of 'anonymous' users who use centre services, although overall, registration has grown steadily, despite the centre closing between February and July 2010 for refurbishment.

The centre promotes positive learning, development and enjoyment for all users well. Many parents expressed deep pride in the qualifications gained, and displays and discussion show that achievement is routinely celebrated within the centre. Activities such as an adult numeracy session observed during the inspection were of high quality. In the period September to December 2010 five parents completed a Level 1 course in Adult Literacy, two parents completed a Level 1 in Adult Numeracy and one parent completed both of these courses. Learners' progress towards employment is not systematically monitored, and the centre could not produce reliable, up-to-date evidence of how this good quality learning and development contributes to an increased economic security for individuals and families.

The joint planning and 'buddying' arrangements set up by the centre teacher between the maintained and private sector providers, to tackle deficits in achievement in the Brooklands area, is showing positive results. This partnership is determined to continue to plan together even after the redeployment of the centre

teacher post and the group has been recognised as a model of good practice.

There is strong documentary and case study evidence of a wide range of activities and courses provided by the centre in the past. However, due to reasons beyond the centre's control, the range of services and activities provided by both the centre and its partners is reducing. Attendance at many sessions is too variable: for example the Young Parents Group, once the most successful activity, is now a focus for further promotion and recruitment due to falling numbers.

The care, guidance and support offered is satisfactory, due in part to diminishing resources, particularly the reduction in outreach worker time. Three outreach workers now give two hours a week each to group work in the centre and do not have capacity to accept referrals or do home visiting. This means that users, including children who attend the crèche, do not always get continuity of care, a fact parents commented upon during the inspection.

Information, advice and guidance, including signposting especially by the reception staff, is a key strength, although the centre does not have the capacity to record or follow up the results of the signposting. Information about agencies offering help for those experiencing domestic trauma or who need sexual health advice is sensitively displayed in toilet cubicles. Centre users unanimously praised the staff for the practical and emotional support they have received, which some describe as life-saving. 'Brilliant, really kind people, always helpful and understanding,' 'Even if you've not been for ages, you're welcomed back, and never made to feel uncomfortable,' were typical of comments made during the inspection.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the assessment of the needs of children, parents and other users</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all users</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The quality of care, guidance and support offered to users within the centre and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>

## **How effective are the leadership and management?**

**3**

The head of centre has forged a committed and professional team, dedicated to improving outcomes for families in the area. Support from the local authority is strong, but governance at the local level is less effective. Some advisory board members have not yet been trained to support their roles and were unaware of the conflict of interest inherent in the head of centre being chair of the advisory board.

Despite this, minutes from meetings attest to the advisory board challenging the head of centre's quarterly reports and the data from which they arise.

The local authority's 'Brooklands ward profile' contains a useful broad overview of life for residents in the Brooklands area. However, systems to gather, analyse and share information about the profile of the reach area are still developing. The leadership recognises that the lack of some key data from the local authority and partner agencies prevents the centre from having an accurate understanding of the needs of the full range of residents.

Little impact data is available to show the difference the centre is making to local lives. The leadership acknowledges that their development plan is currently incomplete, with imprecise targets and measurable success criteria, making it difficult to assess progress towards improvement targets. This also restricts the ability of the local authority and the advisory board to support, challenge and hold the leadership to account. The centre is providing satisfactory value for money because outcomes are satisfactory overall, despite the recent cuts to partner services.

Equality of opportunity is promoted satisfactorily, although the centre does not yet have year-on-year data to demonstrate that the gap is narrowing between the lowest achieving 20% of children and their peers. The centre celebrates diversity satisfactorily with outings, displays and activities around cultural festivals, such as outings to Manchester's Chinatown area to celebrate Chinese New Year. However, these are not always promoted effectively enough to advertise them to all potential attendees. 'We don't always notice the posters if we are in a rush,' said some parents.

The welcoming and relaxed atmosphere is underpinned by well-informed, effective safeguarding arrangements. Regular updates from the Early Intervention Team and outreach workers enable the centre leadership to monitor whether support continues to meet needs. Extensive policies, procedures and guidance on the wider safeguarding agenda further support the safeguarding arrangements. Rigorous recruitment and training procedures ensure that staff are appropriately vetted and trained for their roles, and this helps them to work with social care colleagues to protect the most vulnerable.

The leadership team recognises that evaluation is not used well enough to drive improvement because it is not based on sufficient evidence of impact. What data is held is used well. For example, places on the Learning Through Play programme, which helps parents support their children's literacy and numeracy skills, are allocated on a points system which takes into account factors such as super output area, previous use of centre services and home language. This helps ensure that places go to those who need them most.

The head of centre has fostered positive relationships with all of the partners, but the quality of information exchange to enable the centre leadership to monitor the impact of the centre's work is too inconsistent. Partnership is most productive with

the Early Intervention Team and with education partners, where shared information and joint working is enabling the centre to target support and resources where they are most needed.

The leadership has steadily increased the numbers of families registering at the centre, but they know that they are not yet fully reaching out to all of their vulnerable groups. The leadership and advisory board are investigating more productive ways to promote centre services effectively to users and the wider community, to increase user engagement and participation in decision making.

These are the grades for leadership and management

<b>The extent to which governance, accountability, professional supervision and day to day management arrangements are clear and understood</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which ambitious targets drive improvement, provision is integrated and there are high expectations for users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of users and the wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which evaluation is used to shape and improve services and activities</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services the centre has been commissioned to provide</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>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</b>	<b>3</b>

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

Holyrood Nursery EY375831.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from our website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like us to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## Summary for centre users

We inspected Brooklands Children's Centre on 15–16 June 2011. We judged the centre to be satisfactory overall.

Your willingness to share your views really helped the inspectors understand the impact of your centre in the area, and on your individual lives. Thank you. We found that the centre is good at providing a consistently warm and welcoming environment where everyone feels valued. Although only a small staff team, every member is skilled at supporting families from the moment they enter the safe and attractive building. You said you 'feel like family when you come here' and we can see why.

You said that you feel safe and able to share your problems with staff. We found that all staff are well-trained and skilled in safeguarding and child protection procedures, which they use to work with their colleagues to help you, especially in times of crisis and difficulty.

Adults and children are being supported well to enjoy and achieve in their learning and development, although the centre does not track how successfully the courses for adults help you to progress to further education or employment. There is a particularly effective partnership between the centre, schools and day-care providers to make sure that plans for children's progress are based on a good analysis of their needs.

You gave us many examples of how the staff's kindness and practical support, and the courses and activities provided, have built up your confidence and self-esteem. Some of you told us that this was life-changing for you, giving you the strength to make decisions which greatly improved your families' prospects for a safe and happy future. Parents who were supported through some extremely difficult situations told inspectors that, 'Through coming to the centre, it picked me back up.'

However, the work of the centre is not always promoted well enough to ensure that all users and residents know what is available, and too few centre users are helping the leadership make important decisions about what services the centre offers, so we have asked the leadership to improve this.

The management team recognises that the information it receives from the local authority and from partners, and the information it also gathers, does not fully inform the team about the impact of its work. We have asked the team to improve this, particularly the information about the groups in the area who may experience discrimination. The needs of these vulnerable groups, such as those families who do

not speak English as a first language, are not always included in the planning of services and we have recommended that this be improved.

When information is gathered or received, it is organised very well, and used satisfactorily to help the leadership analyse your centre's strengths and areas for development, and to plan services to meet the needs of the area.

The centre does not set precise enough targets, or describe how the leadership team will measure success. This makes it difficult for the leadership, the advisory board and the local authority to measure the centre's progress towards meeting the targets in their improvement plan, and to know what difference it is making to your lives. We have asked the local authority, the leadership and the centre's partners such as health and social care to work together to improve the quality of information they gather about the impact of the centre's work, and improve the way they use this to plan further improvements.

We have also asked the centre to improve the arrangements to ensure that the advisory board, which is meant to challenge, support and hold the centre to account, is more able to do this objectively. Currently, the chair of the advisory board is the centre manager, which means that she leads the group which challenges her own work.

Once again, on behalf of the inspection team, thank you for your cooperation in the inspection, and for sharing your views so freely with us. We wish you well in the future.

The full report is available from your centre or on our website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).