

Inspection report for Allens Croft Children's Centre

Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	366376
Inspection dates	1–2 February 2012
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Date of previous inspection	3 December 2009
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Linked early years and childcare	Allens Croft Nursery Allens Croft Early Years Centre
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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 an early years inspector.

The inspectors held meetings with strategic and committee board members, senior leaders and managers, representatives of the local authority, health, social care and education professionals, family visitors, early years professionals, parents, carers and also talked to children.

They observed the centre's work, and looked at a range of relevant documentation.

Information about the centre

Allens Croft is a large centre based in Kings Heath, Birmingham. It operates from one site offering multi-agency provision. It is a phase one centre which was designated in August 2005, originally based in a local nursery school. Since 2008 it has operated in new purpose built accommodation. The centre provides a range of integrated services that include health, family support, outreach work, child development and adult training. Sharing the site is a primary school, nursery school and day centre, all of which were judged outstanding in their latest Ofsted inspections. The children's centre manager reports to the head of centre and is supported by 14 other staff. The site is run in partnership between Birmingham City Council and Birmingham Community NHS Trust Children's Service Division. Governance of the children's centre is provided through a sub-committee of the nursery's governing body.

Statistical data for the area indicate that the centre is in an area of mixed social and economic disadvantage. The centres' reach area covers the three wards of Brandwood, Moseley and Kings Heath and Bournville in Birmingham. The percentage of those claiming unemployment benefits in two of the wards is around the Birmingham average and slightly lower in the other. However, there are areas within these wards where there are high numbers of children in workless households. The percentage of the population who have no formal qualifications is much higher in the

most deprived ward, Brandwood, than the rest of the local authority's area. The population is culturally diverse with growing numbers from minority ethnic heritages, particularly Asian and Eastern European. Many children start their early years education with lower levels of skills and knowledge that are expected for their age.

The centre does not directly contract childcare or Early Years' provision.

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 families

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

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

1

Main findings

This outstanding children's centre is providing high-quality services and very effectively targeting families in the area who are the most vulnerable due to their circumstances. The vast majority of families in the area access services provided by the centre. Children from minority ethnic groups, teenage parents, lone parents, disabled children and parents, those who have learning difficulties and children subject to child protection plans receive particularly excellent care, guidance and support. The centre is held in high esteem by local families as it provides seamless working with multi agency partners across all services for children and adults. As a result, outcomes for children and families are outstanding. Many parents undertake both accredited and informal adult learning and job search activities. While the centre monitors these activities closely it has not undertaken sufficient analysis of how successful the accredited learning is or whether job search activities are leading to paid or voluntary work.

The management, staff, governors and committee members know and understand the needs of local families very well. They have set high standards and fully monitor the progress of the areas of priority for the centre. Highly effective partnership working is enabling an outstanding range of services to be fully integrated. Staff are well qualified and experienced. They are frequently called upon to share their best practice and have established an excellent support and developmental network for local childminders.

Safeguarding arrangements are highly prioritised and robust. The centre meets and exceeds legislative requirements and staff have received appropriate levels of

training relative to their roles. For instance, the designated safeguarding officers and family support workers have undertaken higher levels of training. Strong partnership working with social services and child development workers is particularly safeguarding the most vulnerable families.

The centre ensures that its range of services fully meet the needs of all of its families. It offers specific programmes for minority ethnic groups that enable them to participate in activities. The centre embraces and celebrates the multi-cultural society of the area and equality and diversity are well promoted to children. Speakers of English as an additional language are very well supported. All families in the target groups achieve as well as each other.

The availability, quality-sharing and use of resources are outstanding. Families readily acknowledge that these factors are of high quality and really value the amount of services that they can access on one site. Excellent use is made of the parent room, baby café and sensory area. The centre has established a charitable trust and uses the funds very well to provide additional crèche and respite care facilities.

The centre has demonstrated year-on-year improvements leading to high level outcomes relative to parental and child starting points. The centre has an excellent capacity to improve. It uses a wide range of techniques to gain feedback about its services and uses data extremely well in order to measure the impact and make adjustments to its services. Development planning is leading to demonstrable improvements. Demanding targets have been set and most of those for 2011/12 have already been met or exceeded.

What does the centre need to do to improve further?

Recommendations for further improvement

- More closely measure the effectiveness of accredited training courses and job seeking activities to ensure further reductions in the percentage of children living in workless households.

How good are outcomes for families?

1

Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making outstanding progress. In six of the seven receiving schools, children are achieving much higher points scores than the local authority average. Children who access the centre make outstanding progress relative to their starting points. They benefit from outstanding and the latest up-to-date exemplar assessment practices, which are well recorded and shared with all the professionals on-site. This is particularly outstanding for children with disabilities. Staff and volunteers are excellent role models. They give sound advice, guidance and opportunities for children and parents to play together enabling parents to maximise the development of their children.

Families using the centre are improving their health each year, and key indicators for health in the area are much better than the local authority averages. For instance, child obesity rates in the Reception year have dropped significantly in the most deprived ward and overall below the local authority averages and the up-take of breastfeeding both initially and over a longer period of time are well above local rates. The vast majority of families are introduced to the work of the centre at the antenatal stage and all families have a birth visit conducted with health and/or child development practitioners. Excellent partnership working is enabling the centre to quickly identify the most vulnerable families and services are quickly targeted to those families who are in most need.

Parents appreciate the arrangements for families to stay safe, which are strong and exceptionally well promoted. Many activities within the centre focus on the safety of families and children. For instance, there is strong joint working with the police and fire service which promotes good home-safety practices. The excellent family and parenting support is ensuring that the potential for harm or injury of children is minimised, particularly for families who are considered most vulnerable. Staff have an excellent understanding of the Common Assessment Framework and apply this very well and in the sharing of information with other professionals. All children in the area who are subject to child protection plans are working with Allens Croft and in 2010/11 the risk of harm to a significant number of children was reduced.

Parental need is the focus for the work and development of the centre. Parents make an outstanding contribution to shaping services and one parent commented that, 'The centre is here for us and not the other way around'. All of the most vulnerable groups of parents are represented on the children's centre committee. Their views are very well communicated, acted upon and inform the centre development plan. Children's views are identified accurately through strong observation techniques and are well recorded in their comprehensive learning journals. The planning of future activities for children and parents with disabilities is outstanding. The centre provides a comprehensive range of opportunities for families to improve their economic well-being. These are provided through an extensive range of family learning activities, on-site accredited and non accredited foundation courses in English for speakers of other languages, literacy and numeracy and information and communication technology courses. Some courses are particularly aimed at Asian women who are traditionally under-represented in adult education. Family support workers also provide very good signposting to other courses provided by the local further education colleges and adult education service.

Benefit and financial advice is readily available and provided by weekly visits from Jobcentre Plus staff. The centre has recently increased the accessibility of these services by offering a weekly clinic to offer group and one-to-one advice across a range of job seeking and learning and development guidance activities. While the centre is monitoring carefully the range and uptake of activities to improve the economic well-being of families, it is not undertaking sufficient analysis of the success rates in accredited courses or checking whether job-seeking activities are

leading to employment.

Children are encouraged and given outstanding opportunities to gain independent learning skills which prepare them very well for school. Local schools report that children who attend the centre are well prepared for their education.

These are the grades for the outcomes for families

The extent to which children, including those from target groups, are physically, mentally and emotionally healthy and families have healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which children are safe and protected, their welfare concerns are identified and appropriate steps taken to address them	1
The extent to which all children and parents, including those from target groups, enjoy and achieve educationally and in their personal and social development	1
The extent to which children engage in positive behaviour and develop positive relationships and parents, including those from target groups, contribute to decision-making and governance of the centre	1
The extent to which children are developing skills for the future and parents, including those from target groups, are developing economic stability and independence including access to training and employment	2

How good is the provision?

1

The centre provides an excellent range of services. The vast majority of families in the area access them with full participation of many of the target groups. The needs of the area are very well understood through outstanding inter-agency working. Staff at the centre work exceptionally well to provide and enhance services which complements the work in particular of health and social care workers. Most of the staff either live in the local community or have accessed services themselves. They are well qualified and have a thorough understanding of the needs of the area. Staff and volunteers are excellent role models. They give sound advice, guidance and opportunities for children and parents to play together enabling parents to maximise the development of their children.

Assessment methods are thorough and outcomes are very well recorded. Outreach work is excellent and is conducted with other health and social care professionals. Parents particularly welcome this and comment that it means that that they do not 'have to repeat themselves' when accessing services. The outreach work is highly effective in reaching the large percentage of the local community who are intransient due to their homeless circumstances.

The centre promotes and provides a wide range of fun-filled learning and development activities for families. The uptake of informal learning activities is outstanding and in accredited programmes is good. The assessment of prior learning is used very well in order to inform future courses and to signpost families to further learning. School teachers report that parents are much better at engaging in school

activities and better prepared to support their children in school than those who have not accessed services of the centre.

The care, guidance and support to families is highly individualised and outstanding. Parent governors described the centre as having 'a totally can-do attitude' and that 'everything is achievable'. The centre has established a very strong supportive and developmental network for local childminders which enhances their practice, and the centre offers outstanding on-site nursery, day care and crèche facilities. Support for minority ethnic groups is sensitive and includes translation services.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The extent to which the range of services, activities and opportunities meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which the centre promotes purposeful learning, development and enjoyment for all families, including those in target groups	1
The quality of care, guidance and support offered to families, including those in target groups	1

How effective are the leadership and management?

1

Governance of the centre is strong. A board of governors oversees the whole of the work of the centre and is supported by a children's centre committee which is exceptionally well represented by the most vulnerable families. Staff and partners are represented both on the board and committee and lines of accountability are very clear. Parents and partners take their roles and responsibilities on the board and committee extremely seriously, and a number stated that they felt privileged to be included. All parent governors and partners have an excellent understanding of the centre's priorities. While there are no contracted services, all partners working with centre enter a formal partnership agreement which clearly outlines each partner's responsibilities.

The self evaluation process is very well established. Very imaginative ways are used to gain parental views and ensure that services are targeted to meet their needs. The use of data is used very effectively to measure the impact of services the centre provides. Where data has not been easily available historically, the centre has undertaken significant work to obtain it. The current self-evaluation report is based on evidence and the use of target-setting within the development plan is further raising standards.

The centre's resources are outstanding. They are used extensively by the vast majority of families in the area and by almost all of the target groups. Facilities are of high quality and families in the area acknowledge and respect this aspect of the centre's provision. Resources are further supported by the centre's charitable trust which extends to the availability of crèche and respite care. The centre promotes equality and diversity exceptionally well. Activities are well planned to be socially inclusive, available and attractive to all members of the community. Well-attended

community days enable the centre to promote its work to families and organisations who do not routinely use the centre.

Published and centre data demonstrates that the achievement gap in Allens Croft reach area is narrowing significantly and in many instances demonstrates that the area is achieving well.

The arrangements for safeguarding are outstanding and all legislative requirements are met. Safeguarding is highly prioritised and promoted in the centre. Staff are well trained and have access to frequent training and support. Strong policies and procedures ensure that staff are suitable and well supported to work with children and vulnerable adults. The excellent inter-agency working, with clear protocols, is promoting the swift exchange of information for the most vulnerable children including those assessed within the Common Assessment Framework and those who have child protection plans. The recording of this information is very robust. Risk assessment procedures are conducted daily for all activities in the centre. The procedures for assessing risks for home visits and lone working demonstrate high-quality practice.

Partnership working is outstanding and is providing highly-integrated services for families using the centre, particularly for those from minority ethnic groups, lone and young parents and for disabled children and parents. Partners value the opportunity to work with Allens Croft and can demonstrate how the partnership working is providing highly beneficial and continually improving services for local families.

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	1
The effectiveness of evaluation and its use in setting ambitious targets which secure improvement in outcomes	1
The extent to which resources are used and managed efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of families, including those in target groups	1
The extent to which equality is promoted and diversity celebrated, illegal or unlawful discrimination is tackled and the centre fulfils its statutory duties	1
The effectiveness of the centre's policy, procedures and work with key agencies in safeguarding children and, where applicable, vulnerable adults	1
The extent to which partnerships with other agencies ensure the integrated delivery of the range of services provided by the centre to meet its core purpose	1
The extent to which the centre supports and encourages families in the reach area to engage with services and uses their views to develop the	1

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

The most recent inspection reports for Allens Croft Primary School, Nursey and Early Years Centre all of which were judged as outstanding.

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Summary for centre users

We inspected the Allens Croft Children's Centre on 1–2 February 2012. We judged the centre as outstanding overall.

We would like to thank the many of you who spoke to us, particularly those who came into the centre specifically to give us your comments. You told us that the work of the centre is highly valued, is changing lives and improving the chances of your children and families.

Your children are making outstanding progress relative to their starting points. You receive excellent guidance and support in parenting skills and this is enabling your children to continue to do well when they start school. The vast majority of children in the area who have attended the children's centre do well at school. Their Early Years Foundation points scores are higher and in many cases higher than that for Birmingham as a whole. The primary school, nursery and early years centre on the same site as the children's centre were all judged to be outstanding in their most recent Ofsted reports.

The centre provides you with very good access to highly specialised services and many of you told us you would not use these services if they were not provided locally at the centre. You highly value and trust the information, advice and guidance that you are receiving particularly those of you who are new to the area, staying temporarily and do not speak English as your first language.

You have access to very high quality resources and you use them to the best advantage. The sensory room, parents room and toy library are examples of this. The centre staff have excellent knowledge and experiences and they use these to best advantage in order to provide you with the services and activities that you want and need. The centre provides particularly good outreach work and home visiting in conjunction with other services for those who have difficulty in attending the centre or do not have enough confidence to do so.

The vast majority of you let the centre know what services are important to you and what you wish to be provided or improved. Please continue to do this as it gives the staff at the centre excellent opportunities to hear your views and to make the services even better. Parents are well represented on the committee and the parent governors take their responsibilities very seriously. They understand the priorities of the centre and make a strong contribution in making sure that services meet your needs. The centre does excellent work with health, social and child development workers and gives much emphasis to working with partners in a highly effective way. Many of the staff in the centre either live in your community or have previously accessed the services of the centre. They understand your needs and give you excellent support.

The centre is very successful at safeguarding the families who use the centre. The arrangements for this are strong and the partnership working with other agencies is highly effective at reducing the numbers of children who are at risk of harm in the area. The centre is giving very good advice and guidance to improve safety in the home and improve child safety through improved parenting skills.

Many of you undertake formal qualifications and job search activities at the centre. We have asked the centre to improve its analysis of these activities to ensure that more of you are successful in gaining qualifications and work. This is so that the centre can have better information to further target the services it provides for you. You can help it to achieve this by letting the centre staff know if you are struggling with your training course or have been successful in gaining paid work or voluntary employment.

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